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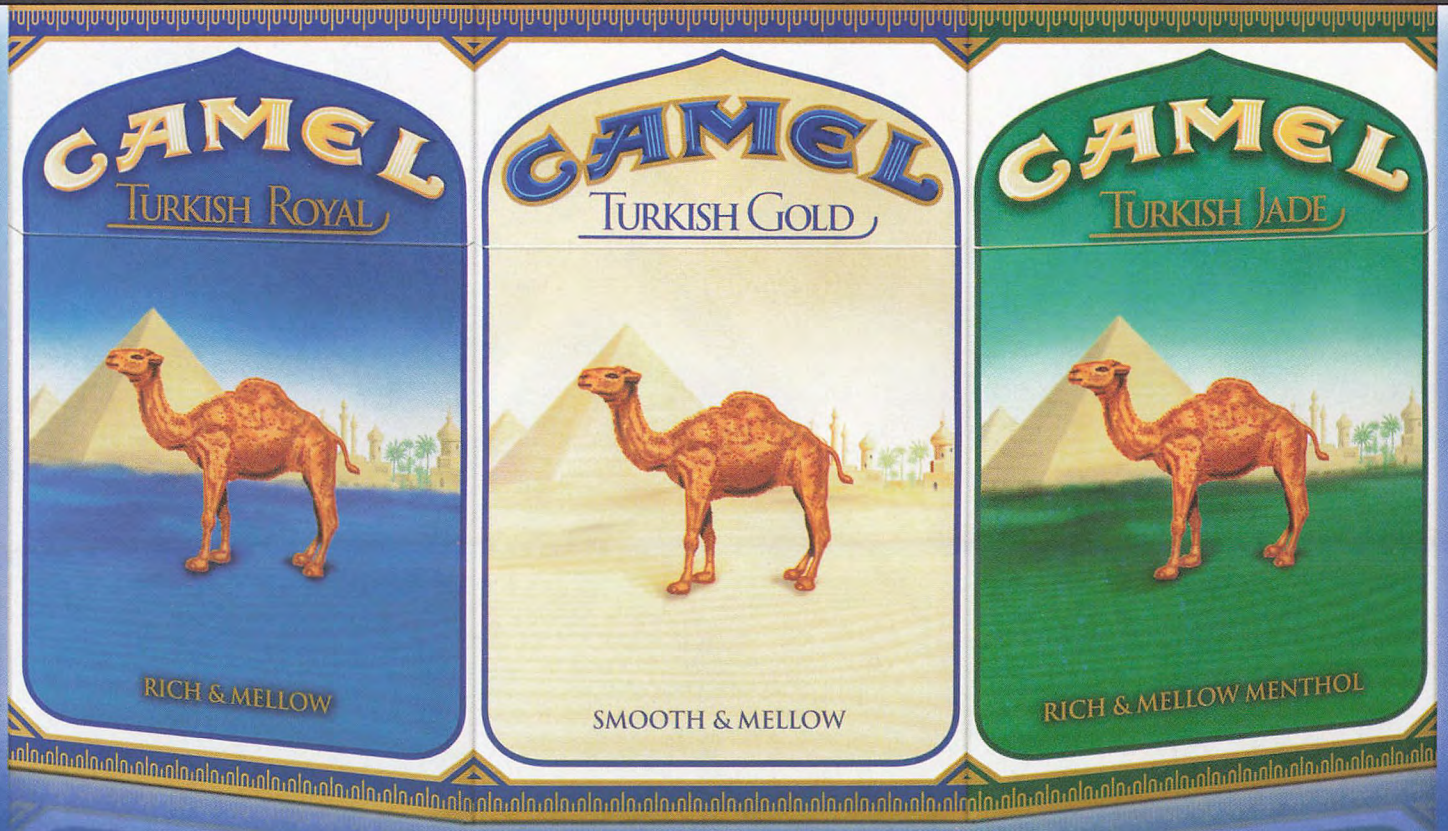

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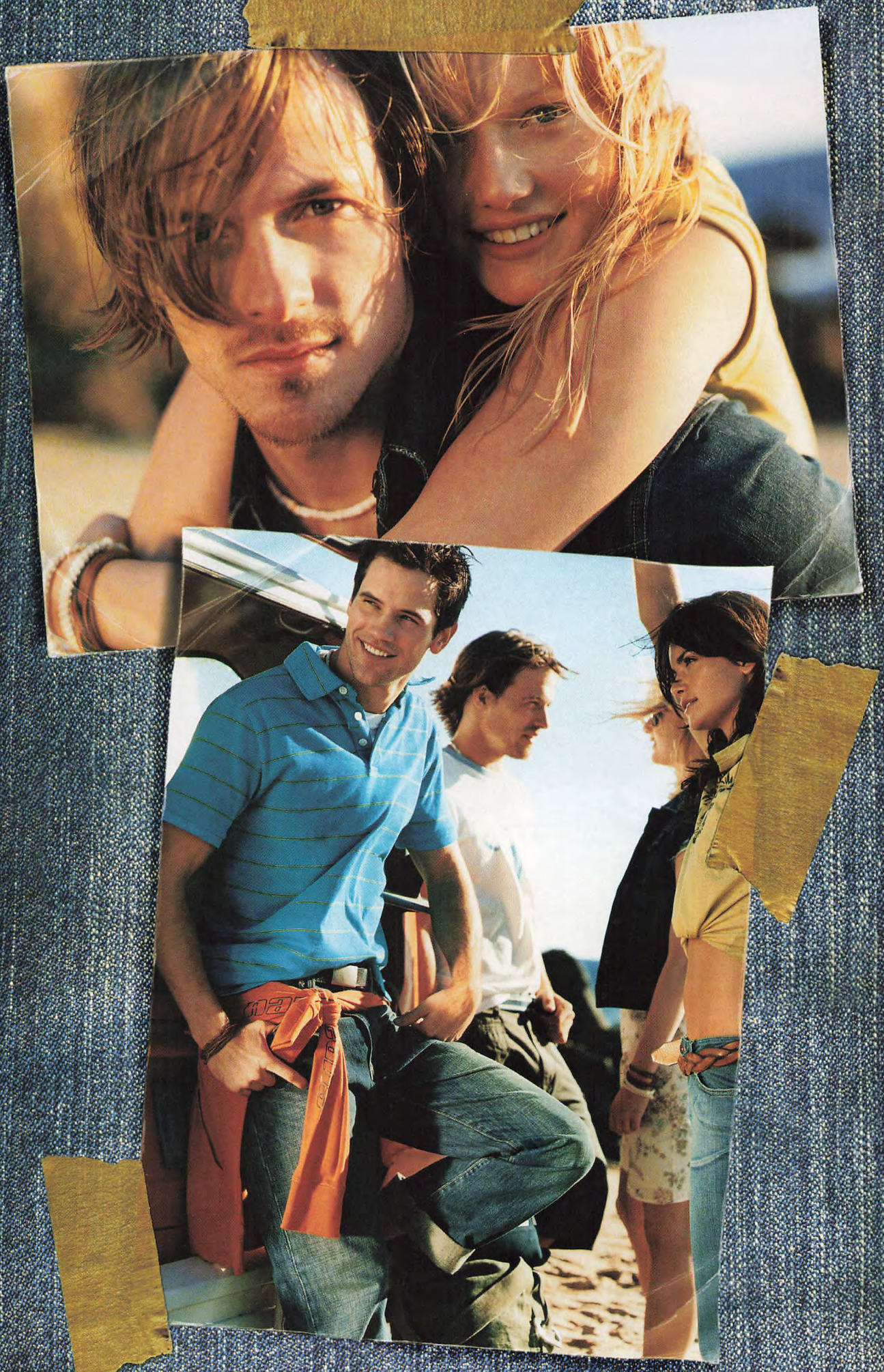

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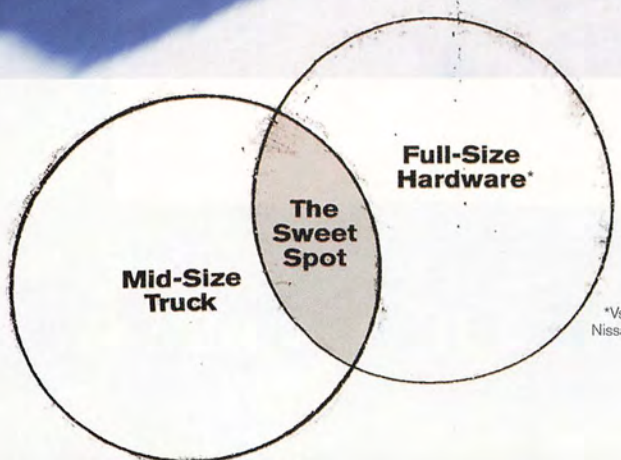

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BLENDER
MARCH 2005

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Why is this woman smiling? Because, at 34, she's just made the best record of her life, and people have finally stopped asking her about her breakdown. Well, almost . . . .

97 ROCK'S MOST VICIOUS INSULTS
Oh, *snap*! For your amusement, *Blender* shows what happens when rockers attack — each other.

102 MÖTLEY CRÜE
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114 $848: THE KINGS OF LEON
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116 33 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RAY CHARLES
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ON THE COVER

MARIAH CAREY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
JAMES WHITE

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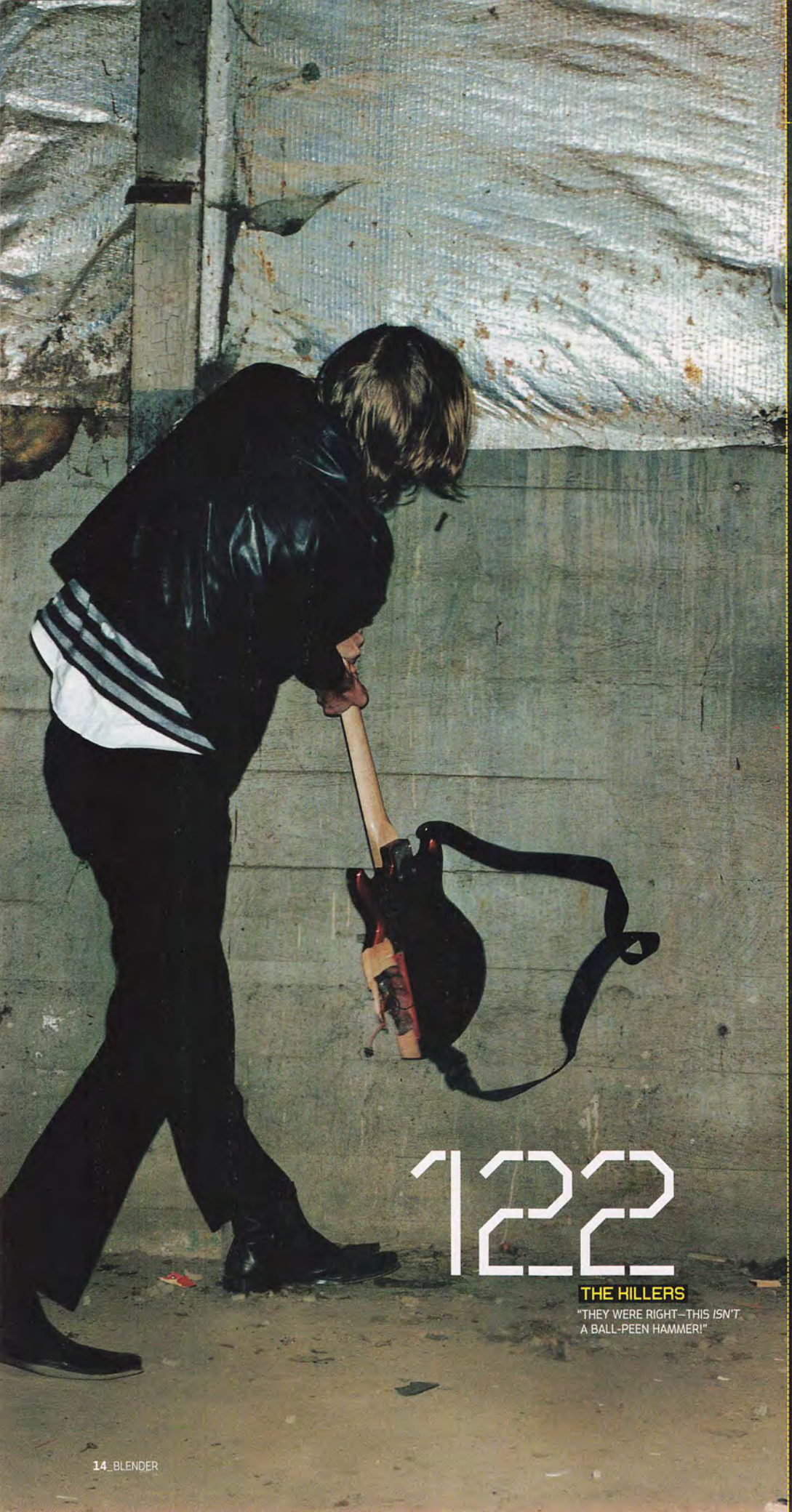

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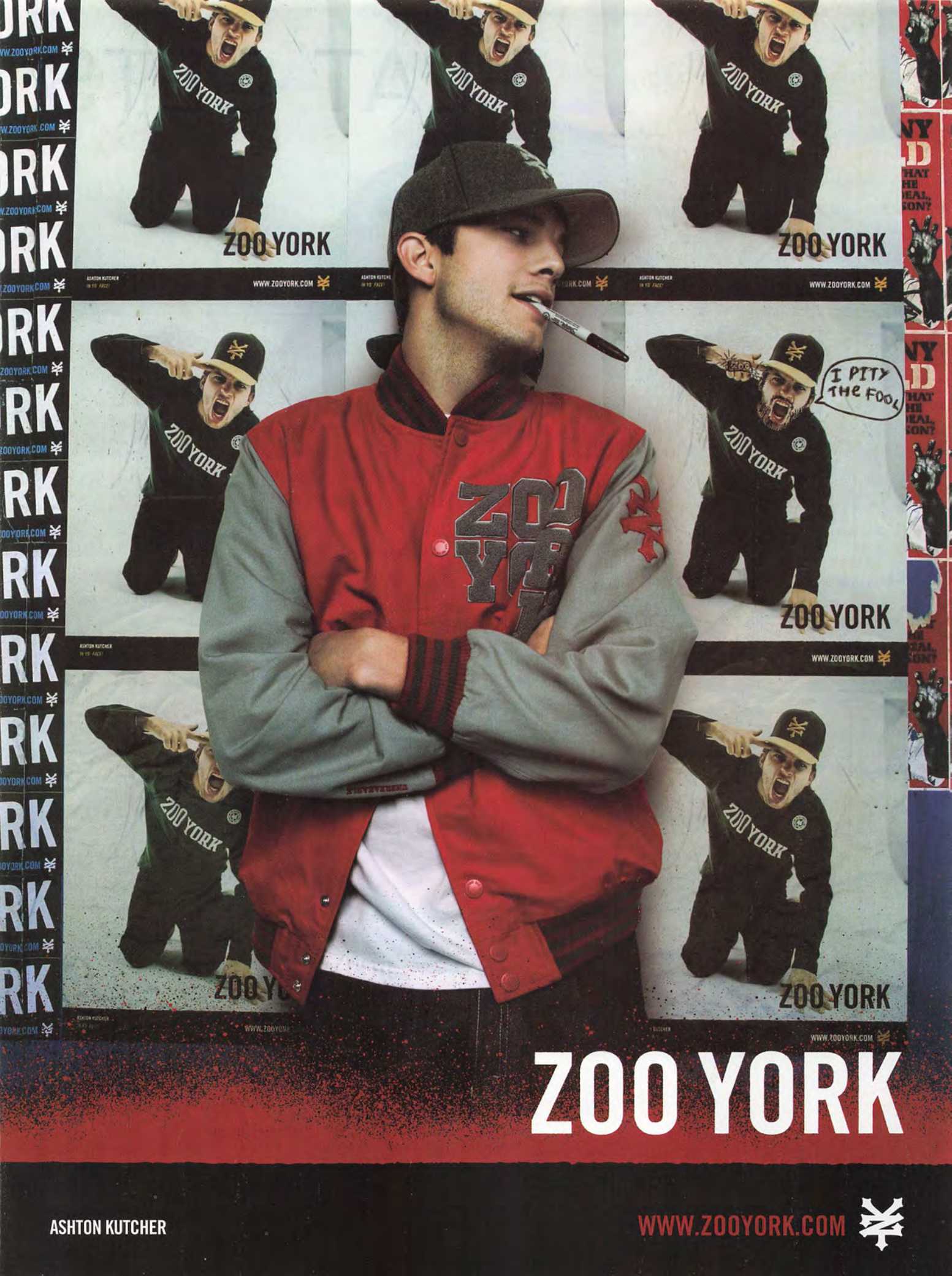
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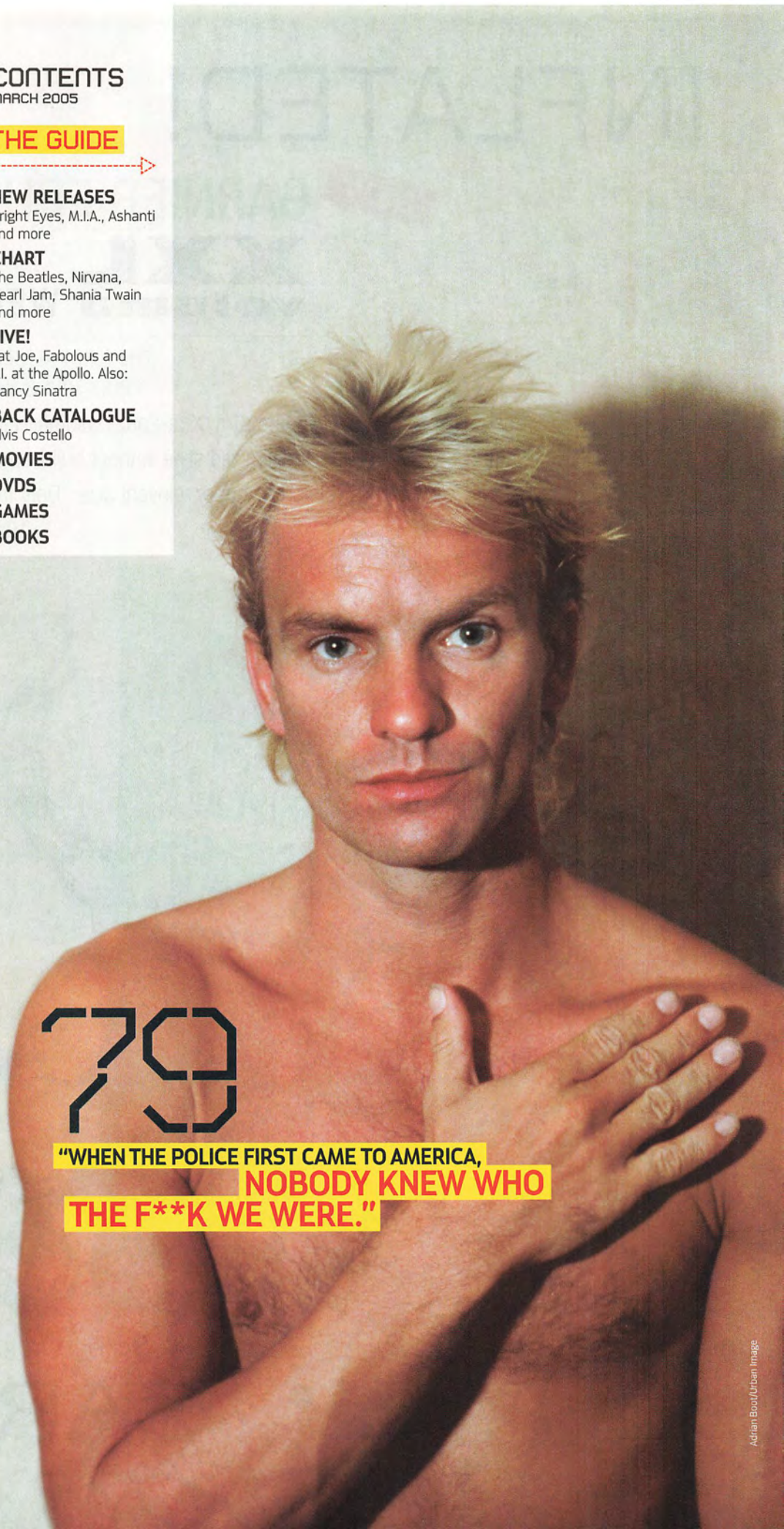

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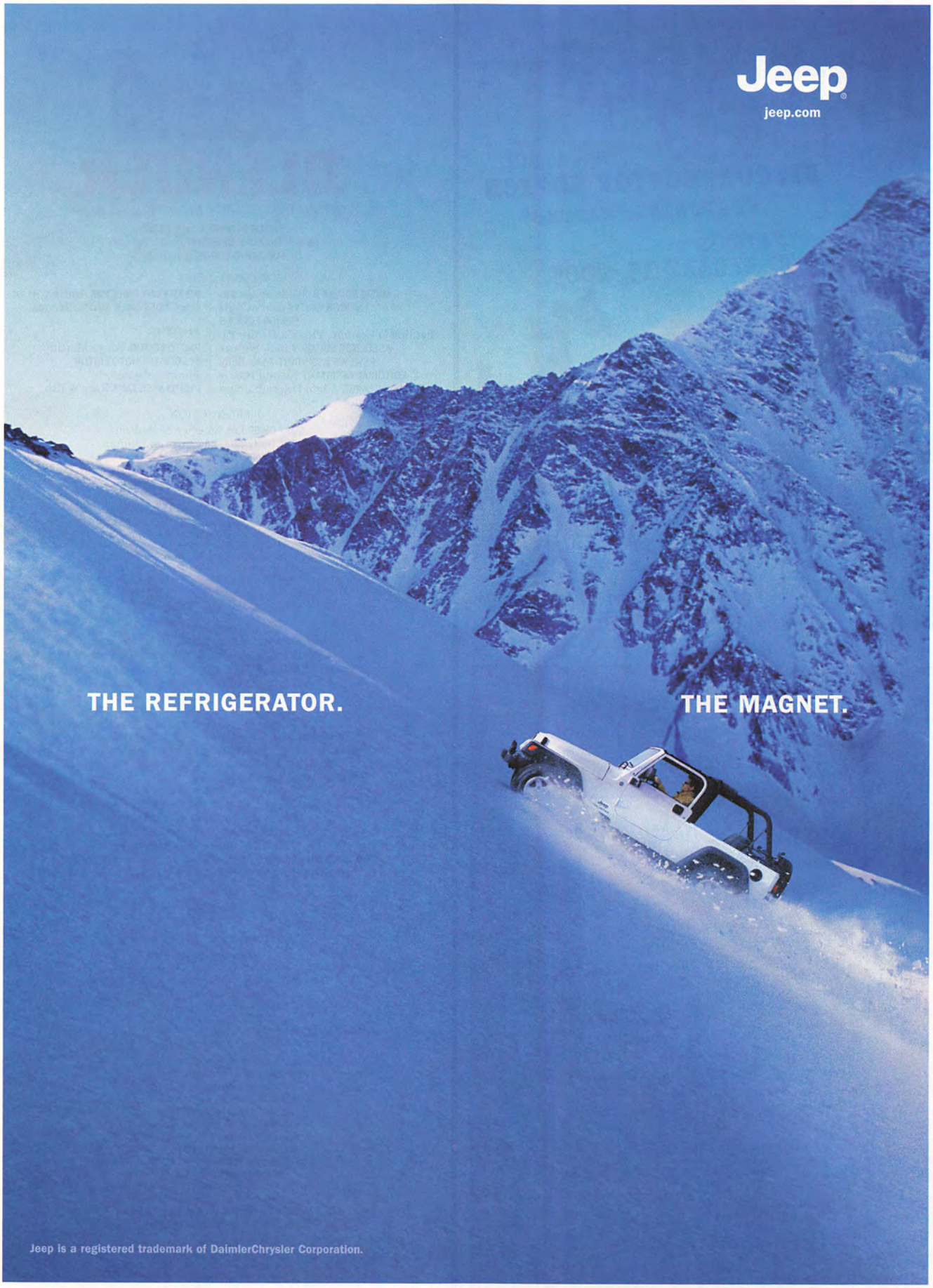
"WHEN THE POLICE FIRST CAME TO AMERICA, NOBODY KNEW WHO THE F**K WE WERE."

Adrian Boot/Urban Image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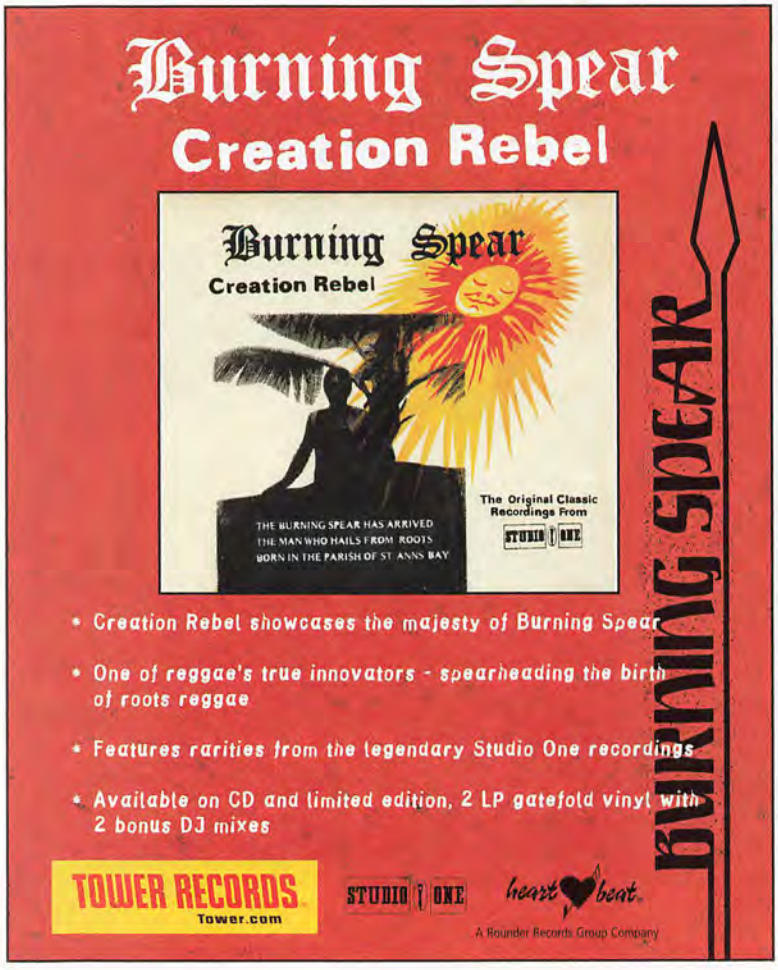
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O.D.B.: R.I.P.

Such a poignant O.D.B. spine lyric on your Jan./Feb. issue: "Nothin' can stop me from buryin' my bones."

PAT GUILLERMO, WICHITA, KS

FREE ADVICE

I loved that *Blender* chose to end the magazine with the lyrics to the Clash's "Stay Free" on the last page ["Go easy, step lightly, stay free"] – what a tribute to such a great band, and good advice too!

JENNIFER NADLER, INDIAN HILLS, NY

SNOOP: BAD ACTOR

Am I being overly cynical to suspect that the reason Snoop Dogg was omitted from your list of the "Worst Rock-Star Actors" was not unconnected to the fact that he happened to be on the cover? Or do you really think that *Bones* was a good movie?

DENNIS ALBO, KANSAS CITY

Bones is, without question, the best zombie-pimp movie ever made. Of course, it's also the *only* zombie-pimp movie ever made. But, whatever – that's not our fault.

SNOOP: BAD MAN

As much as I like Snoop, isn't it a bit silly for him to get mad about being asked about weed and his gangsta past? It's not as if he raps about picking daisies and going to Bed, Bath & Beyond.

DANIELLE ROB, LEWES, DE

SNOOP: ABOUT TIME

I just wanted to say it's about damn time you had Snoop on the cover!

WENDY LINDLEY, ORLANDO

BEST JOB EVER

Your Lil Jon piece was awesome. But I have a question: Was it when the *Blender* "entourage" members appeared onstage with the crunk legend or when they were doing tequila shots in the back of his stretch Hummer that they realized they have the best job in the world?

KELLY ZAMOT, BETHESDA, MD

It's not all fun and games working at *Blender*, you know. There's the. . . Uh . . . And the . . . Actually, we're going to have to get back to you on that.

Never let Snoop dogsit.

CONGRATULATIONS TO PAUL AASE OF ORLANDO, THE **WINNER OF BLENDER'S JAN./FEB. CROSSWORD CONTEST,** WHO SCORED AN APPLE PHOTO IPOD.

BETTER BY THE DOZEN

It's rare that I get excited about a magazine, but *Blender* is so unique among music magazines that I had to write and thank you for publishing it. Your irreverent sense of humor makes the magazine not only informative but a joy to read. The only complaint I have is that coming out 10 times a year is not enough!

LAURA ODEN, SAN FRANCISCO

Prepare to be happy, Laura. We're going 11 times in 2005, 12 in 2006.

WE HATE VELVET REVOLVER

I see you guys are Velvet Revolver haters. Not only were they not included in your 50 Greatest CDs of 2004 list – Courtney Love and Björk made the list and VR didn't?! What country am I living in?!?! They were also screwed over in the 50 Greatest Songs of 2004 list – "Slither" gets passed up in favor of "Got It Twisted"?! For God's sake, man – Mobb Deep sampled Thomas Dolby! Thomas Dolby! I'm either in Hell or Canada – I'll flip a coin . . . .

JUSTIN HAMELIN, WAUKEGAN, IL

WHAAAT?

I bet you're glad Lil Jon took you to the Source Awards and not the Vibe Awards ceremony/stabfest.

JAN SCHILLER, PFLUGERVILLE, TX

Hey we can handle ourselves. And by "handle ourselves" we mean "run away really fast."

POOPY BALLS!

Re "How to (Not) Name Your Band": I think Poopy Balls is a great name! It's better than Bowling for Soup anyway. Do you mind if I steal it? My band, the Dickwads, could use a better name.

LILI PALMER, ORLEANS, VT

Please be our guest. →

Sheryl Nields

LISTEN UP

BLENDER READERS: We want to hear from you. If we print your letter in our next issue, we'll send you the new Atari Flashback videogame console.

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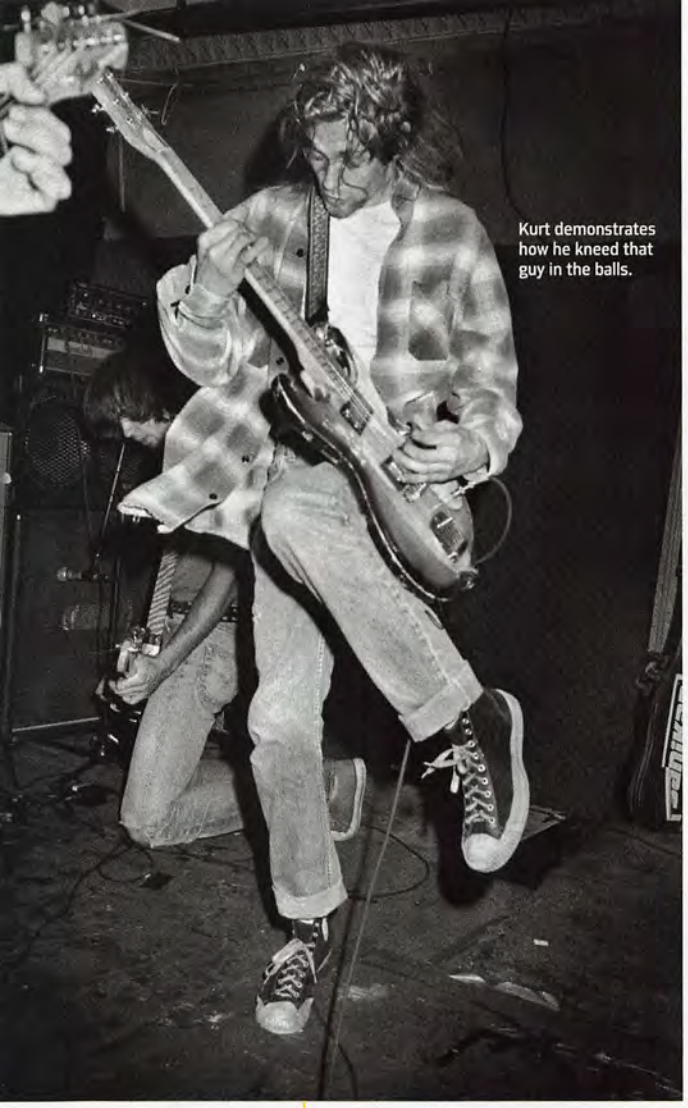
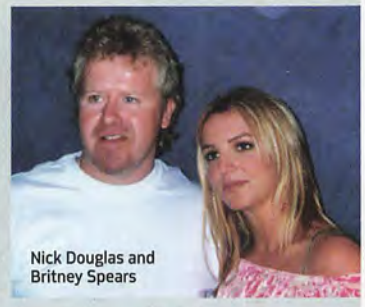


Kurt demonstrates how he kneed that guy in the balls.

SUPERFAN

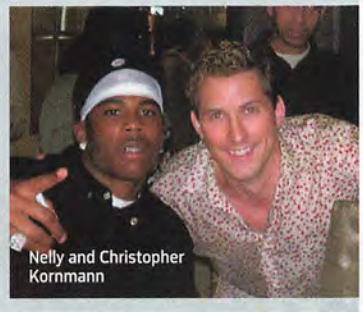
BRINGING OUT THE STALKER IN YOU SINCE 2001

Slash, Julie Sadoian and Sebastian Bach



Nick Douglas and Britney Spears

Korcan Dincer and Lindsay Lohan



Nelly and Christopher Kornmann

Jessica Poser and Willie Nelson

Mary J. Blige and Monique Barz

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Pauline Rubio: "Anyone else feel a breeze?"

UNPLEASANT UNDERWEAR

Thanks a bunch for revealing in "33 Things You Should Know About Nirvana" that Kurt liked to wear zebra-striped briefs. It's going to be very hard to take any of his music seriously again.

JANELLE LOWRY, LINDEN, NJ

Then it's good we didn't tell you about Dave Grohl's Chewbacca thong.

THONG, THONG, THONG, THONG

Congratulations on printing a picture of Paulina Rubio's thong-clad butt for no good reason whatsoever [Ms. Rubio was, in fact, hosting the MTV Latin Music Awards]. Is this letter reason enough to print it again?

JOSH FROUMAN, BRIGHTON, MI

Yes it is.

ACID CASUALTY

As the last word on the whole Ashlee Simpson/*SNL*/acid reflux debacle, I would just like to point out that, to the best of my knowledge, Keith Richards has been clinically dead for almost 20 years now, and he still plays live.

STEVE NOGUERA, SAFFORD, AZ

WE'RE ANGELS!

Pity me, *Blender*: I only recently discovered what it means to rock & roll. Thanks to you, I was totally turned on to Ryan Adams. As soon as I read on his death chart that he was going to die in 2040, I decided I better get in as much rockin' as possible. If not for you, I would still be listening to shit-ass emo. Basically, you saved my life. You are angels.

ADAM HOLLIDAY, SEATTLE

That explains these huge wings. *Whew.*

ADRIAN GRENIER: HOT

How hot is Adrian Grenier? And how great is his taste in music? Please tell me he's single.

DAN MUGGERIDGE, TAYLOR, TX

Does it say "*Blender* dating agency" on our door? It does? Well, that explains the next letter.

CONOR OBERST: HIM TOO

Reading your Conor Oberst feature made me want to have his children. And I'm a man!

ANDY CLEMENTS, ABERDEEN, NC →

Cobain: Ian Tilton/Retna UK; Rubio: Scott Gries/Getty Images

Dear Ketel One Drinker
Hello again.

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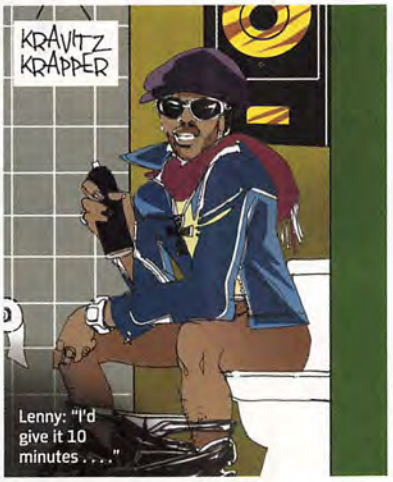
Steve Jones's maître d' job wasn't working out.



AWESOMELY INCOMPREHENSIBLE

Congratulations, *Blender*! It's about time someone wrote about what a radio genius Steve Jones is. I've been listening to his show since it started and it's an absolutely brilliant alternative to the predictable crap that ruins the airwaves, even if I have no idea what he's talking about 50 percent of the time.

ERNIE GALPIN, LOS ANGELES

IF POP STARS WERE DOGS. . .

DOES YOUR DOG RESEMBLE A POP STAR?

Send us a photo with your name and address and who your dog happily resembles. If we print your photo, you'll win an iPod from HP, along with HP's printable tattoos to personalize it!

BUSTER
THE DOG

RUBEN STUDDARD
THE POPSTAR

NUTS!

As a *Blender* subscriber, I love the monthly Burner section of the mag, never more so than when you recently featured a photo of Lindsay Lohan in a bikini, and then Beyoncé the following month. Imagine my disappointment when this month featured the photo of a naked Extreme Elvis and his guitar player's left nut. Ughh! Maybe you can make up for it by printing another picture of Holly Williams?

CONRAD CORDOVA, LAKEWOOD, CO

LOVELY, LOVELY GWEN

Thank you soooooooo much, *Blender*, for your brilliant article on Gwen Stefani! I've been a huge fan of hers for a bunch of years, and love how down to earth she seems. There are so few musicians out there who are as humble as she is in her interviews. It was great to get to read about one of my favorite artists of all time!

STACEY STANTON, ACWORTH, GA

MAN OR WOMAN?

I would just like to let you know that I am blown away by Adrian Deevoy's interviewing skills. Please pass along to, um . . . well, I don't know if Adrian is a guy or girl . . . it's a very androgynous name . . . but please pass along that I have never enjoyed an interview so thoroughly as I did this one. I feel as if I got to know U2 a bit better. Thanks for an amazing and excellent interview of one of my favorite bands.

RYAN REGALL, CHICO, CA

Adrian is a man. At least, that's what (s)he says.

FULL OF CRAP

First you run a cartoon about how Dave Matthews's tour bus supposedly dumped a "dump" load over a boat. Then you follow up with a cartoon about Lenny Kravitz's malfunctioning toilet. Are you going to illustrate all excrement-related pop-star mishaps from now on?

AMANDA RYAN, WINCHESTER, VA

Yes. It's a tax thing.

ASSAULT ON PEPPER

Your "Worst Rock-Star Actors" feature was hilarious! Unfortunately, I'm old enough to remember when *Sgt. Pepper's* (the movie) actually came out. I also remember one of the Bee Gees saying how sad it was that, after people saw the film, nobody would listen to the original Beatles versions ever again. The dicks.

SUSAN TROUT, WETHERSFIELD, CT

BEYONCÉ: NOT ALL THAT

Why, oh why did you give in to the "Beyoncé is so great" hype? Let me say that the other girls in Destiny's Child would have blown up too if Mr. Knowles had put his all into them as he has done for his daughter. Kelly can sing and Michelle's gospel albums have done very well. But let's face it: DC was created to make Ms. B a star, and nothing more.

SHAWNEEN HICKS, CLEVELAND

SEE YOU IN COURT

So, R. Kelly is suing Jay-Z for $75 million after the cancellation of their joint tour. Makes you wonder how much — for example — an underage girl should demand for being urinated on and videotaped.

VIC BERNSTEIN, CRANFORD, NJ

Jones: Sheryl Nields; Studdard: Steve Granitz; illustration: John Jay

 "Same hair, revolution/Same build, evolution."

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BLENDER
NEXT ISSUE
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JENNIFER LOPEZ
TAKES ON THE HATERS
ON SALE TUESDAY, MARCH 15
Ruven Afanador/Corbis Outline

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BURNER

DEATH METAL

THE BELOVED EX-PANTERA GUITARIST "DIMEBAG" DARRELL ABBOTT WAS GUNNED DOWN ONSTAGE BY A CRAZED EX-MARINE

ON DECEMBER 8, "Dimebag" Darrell Abbott, founder of '90s thrash-metal giants Pantera, was shot to death during a set with his band Damageplan in Columbus, Ohio. The group had just taken the stage of the 640-person-capacity Alrosa Villa nightclub when, at 10:18 P.M., a 25-year-old ex-Marine named Nathan Gale pushed past bouncers and bounded onto the stage, where he grabbed the 38-year-old guitarist and unloaded a 9-mm bullet into his head.

Gale reportedly shot Abbott several more times as he fell, then shot bouncer Erin Halk, 29, who tried to intervene, fan Nathan Bray, 23, and Damageplan's head of security, Jeff "Mayhem" Thompson, 40, all of whom died from their wounds. Gale also wounded the band's tour manager, Chris Paluska, and drum tech, John Brooks. As he held another patron in a headlock at gunpoint, Gale was shot and killed by a Columbus police officer.

Within days of the shootings, Web sites carried bereaved messages from Ozzy Osbourne and members of Kiss, Queen and Metallica, along with artists as far-flung as Trent Reznor and Michelle Branch. Six days after his death, several thousand mourners filled Texas's Arlington Convention Center, including guitarist Eddie Van Halen, who held a cell-phone to the mike to play an exuberantly profane message Abbott had left him after a gig they'd played together.

Out of respect for Abbott's family, former Pantera singer Phil Anselmo did not attend. Since Pantera dissolved in 2003, the two ex-bandmates had exchanged barbs in the press; Anselmo had only recently told *Metal Hammer*, "I could kill him like a fuckin' piece of vapor." After the tragedy, he softened. "I love him like a brother loves a brother," Anselmo said in a statement.

Gale murdered Abbott exactly 24 years after Mark David Chapman murdered John Lennon, for motives that appear to be as inscrutable. With his shaved head and thick glasses, the six-foot-three, 250-lb. Pantera fan had unnerved Columbus-area scenesters with erratic behavior that included claiming Pantera had stolen his lyrics. Hours before the murders, Gale visited a frequent haunt, the Bear's Den tattoo parlor, and got into a confrontation with an employee. "He flipped out, screamed 'Bullshit!' and stormed out," says studio manager Lucas Bender, 24.

A week later, Gale's mother, Mary Clark, told a Columbus TV station that she had given Gale the 9-mm Baretta used in the shootings as a reward for completing a year in the Marines. He was prematurely discharged in 2003 after being diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, according to Clark. Gunnery Sgt. Kristine Scarber of the Pentagon refused to comment on the circumstances of his discharge.

Although some reports had Gale cursing Abbott for breaking up Pantera, Bender suspects more unknowable reasons for the killings. "I remember looking in his eyes and thinking he was just starting to hate life," Bender says.

CHRIS NORRIS WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY JOHN CONNOLLY

Before police killed Nathan Gale, he murdered four people.

Ex-Marine Gale killed Dimebag with a gun his mother bought him.

This page, left to right: James D. DeCamp/KRT/Newscom; Splash News; Mike Simons/Getty/Newscom; Opposite page: Clay Patrick McBride/Retna Ltd.

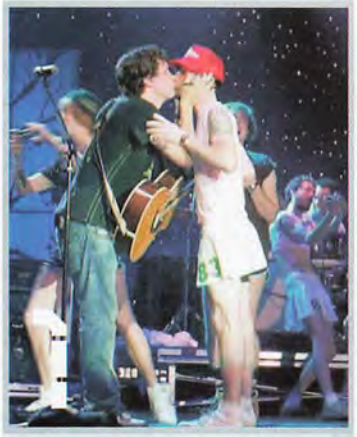
WHY "DIMEBAG"?

"Diamond was my nickname to start with," Abbott said in 1999. "Then it turned to Dimebag because I could only afford a dimebag." Derek Shulman, who signed Pantera 14 years ago, added that the nickname Diamond "was a bit glam, and as their music morphed into heavy metal, he became first known as Dime Darrell and eventually Dimebag. It had nothing to do with drugs."

"Dimebag" Darrell Abbott: R.I.P.

STEAMY!

JOHN MAYER and MAROON 5's Adam Levine make out onstage in Atlanta. Sweet!



Maroon 5 prank tourmate John Mayer by rushing onstage in cheerleaders' uniforms. The "Your Body Is a Wonderland" singer retaliates by kissing Adam Levine.

Levine seems reluctant to man-snog.

Mayer wins and, with full lips parted, kisses Levine tenderly.

NEWS ROUNDUP

Between flights at Murtala Muhammed airport in Nigeria, 50 CENT's security got into a brawl with Nigerian rapper Idris Abdulkareem following an argument over plane seats. 50's remaining tour dates were canceled.

Wal-Mart is being served a class-action suit for selling EVANESCENCE's live album *Anywhere but Home*. Trevin Skeens of Brownsville, Maryland, bought the album for his 13-year-old daughter and was shocked by an F-word in the lyrics. If successful, he and any other traumatized buyers might win $75,000 in damages.

WORD!

"In my next life, I'm going to be a guy and I'm going to be a slut."
GWEN STEFANI

Young Buck arriving at the Vibe Awards, November 15.

The brawl.

In Da Jail

G-Unit rapper Young Buck accused of stabbing Dr. Dre's bully

TENNESSEE-BORN RAPPER and 50 Cent sidekick Young Buck turned himself in after a warrant was issued for his arrest. Buck — whose real name is David Darnell Brown — was charged with attempted murder and assault with a deadly weapon after allegedly stabbing a man during the chair-tossing brawl at the Vibe Awards ceremony this past November.

Moments before presenters Quincy Jones and Snoop Dogg were to hand Dr. Dre a Lifetime Achievement award, a 26-year-old man identified as Jimmy "James" Johnson approached Dre and punched him in the face — while television cameras were still rolling. Buck allegedly retaliated immediately by stabbing Johnson, who later suffered a collapsed lung. Buck, who had been arrested several times for minor offenses in Nashville, was released after posting $500,000 bail.

BUCK "IS SEEN SWINGING THE KNIFE AT MR. JOHNSON."

While Buck's court date is pending, police have widened their investigation, looking for links between Johnson and rap mogul Marion "Suge" Knight, who attended the ceremony without an invitation and sat a few rows behind Dre. Currently on parole, it is a condition of Knight's release that he avoid contact with Dre, his former Death Row Records partner-turned-rival. Knight denied any wrongdoing, saying, "One thing about me, if I do something, I'm a claim it."

Buck, 23, whose solo debut, 2004's *Straight Outta Ca$hville*, has sold almost 1 million copies, maintains his innocence despite a videotape that police claim catches the rapper red-handed.

"Mr. Brown is seen lunging over another male and swinging the knife at Mr. Johnson's upper body while Johnson is looking away from him," says Santa Monica police spokesperson J.T. Butts Jr. However, Young Buck's attorney Scott Leemon offered a counter-argument, insisting that "pictures may be deceiving." JONAH WEINER

"Funkafied version of *The People's Court* TV show in the background/Mack minista."

Maroon 5: Bobby Lacey; Young Buck: Arnold Turner/Wireimage.com; Vibe Awards: Splash News/Fox/Newscom

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ALL ABOUT US!

FAVORITE SONG
"Por una Cabeza" by Roberto Goyenche (Keyboardist Didi Gutman)

MOST DIVA-LIKE DEMAND
"Stop talking to me now." (Singer Sabina Sciubba)

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY WHILE LISTENING
Enjoying a drink and some greasy pork. (Sciubba)

LIP-SYNCING: OK OR EVIL?
OK, but only if you're eating pork chop sandwiches while doing it. (Gutman)

CRUSHINGLY HIP IN A EUROTRASH JET-SET KIND OF WAY.

Brazilian Girls

NEITHER BRAZILIAN, NOR ALL GIRLS. DISCUSS.

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

FIRST, LET'S GET the obvious out of the way. No, they are not Brazilian, and they are not all girls. Instead, they are a multinational four-piece desperate, they say, for attention.

"Calling ourselves Brazilian Girls was a good way of getting people through the door," explains drummer Aaron Johnston. "Once they got over their initial disappointment, we started to impress them with our music."

Johnston, from Kansas City, is grinning inanely. The band, all in their early 30s, just arrived in Amsterdam on a promo tour. Sprawled across a hotel room is evidence that some local pot has been smoked. Next to him is keyboardist Didi Gutman from Buenos Aires and Californian bassist Jesse Murphy.

And here comes their striking singer, Sabina Sciubba, born in Rome and raised in Munich and Nice. Sciubba herself is enigma personified. She sings in a relaxed, sultry voice — think Björk by way of Nina Simone — in no fewer than five European languages, and often performs wearing a trench coat with masking tape over her eyes. "We're trying to show off, I suppose," she purrs. "People like a lot of diversity, mixed in with some fun."

Their self-titled debut album is a tropical-funk-meets-dub affair, and is crushingly hip in a Eurotrash jet-set kind of way. "Pussy" is one of the more memorable tracks.

Sciubba laughs. "Well, 90 percent of the men of my acquaintance have nothing but pussy and marijuana on their minds," she explains. "It's not just about sex. There is also political expression on the album. Think of us as urban storytellers." [BLENDER]

OUT NOW BRAZILIAN GIRLS *VERVE FORECAST*

Styling by Nicole Guliotta; Prop design by Shawn Patrick Anderson

SABINA: DRESS BY ASHLEY TYLER. EARRINGS BY LISA LEVINE. SHOES BY HELMUT LANG. JESSE: JACKET BY CRAIG ROBINSON. AARON: SHIRT BY DUNCAN QUINN. PANTS BY CRAIG ROBINSON. DIDI: JACKET BY DUNCAN QUINN.

"Tall and tan and young and lovely/The girl from Ipanema goes walking."

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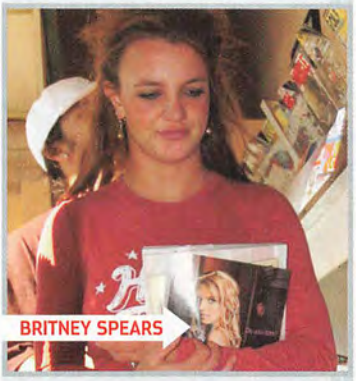
POP STAR MUST HAVE

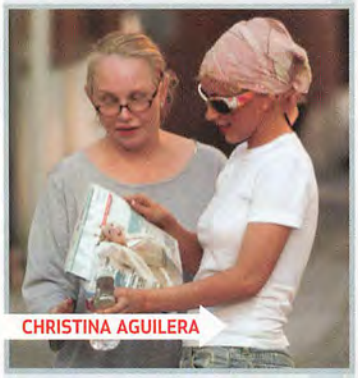
SELF LOVE!

More flattering than a mirror? A magazine featuring . . . *me*!


BRITNEY SPEARS

ASHLEE SIMPSON

PARIS HILTON


CHRISTINA AGUILERA

NEWS ROUNDUP

DMX has blamed the incident at New York's JFK airport, when he smashed his SUV through parking-lot gates and then pretended to be a federal agent, on all the Valium he was taking.

A former Navy diver who considered himself SHERYL CROW's "spiritual twin" has been cleared of stalking the singer and her family for a year. "This could have been better handled if it was recognized for what it was — an honorable man trying to court a good woman," said Crow-obsesser Ambrose Kappos, 38.

A NIRVANA fan paid $7,000 for a private flight with Krist Novoselic, who has a pilot's license. The money is going toward the former bassist's political organization, People for the American Way.

LIPLOCK

LIP-SYNCING LINDSAY LOHAN PULLS AN ASHLEE SIMPSON

LINDSAY LOHAN WAS caught lip-syncing in November while performing her new single "Rumors" on *Good Morning America*, a show on which singers are required to sing live. Vocal tracks continued to play as she missed cues throughout the performance. Kim Jakwerth of Lohan's label, Casablanca, insisted that she "sang completely live." A few days later, on *Live with Regis and Kelly*, the pop hopeful said she was too sick to perform.

WORD!

"I think Prince Charles is fab. I'd suck his willy!"
SHARON OSBOURNE

HEAD CASE!

Guitar-smashing Vines singer said to be autistic

ACCUSED OF KICKING a photographer and smashing her camera during a concert in Sydney, Craig Nicholls has been cleared of assault charges on grounds of mental disability.

After the incident last May, the temperamental Vines frontman was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, a mild form of autism. Marked by anti-social outbursts and abnormal speech patterns, the neurobiological disorder is estimated to affect 1 in 500 people. A band spokesman insists the band has not broken up. *NOEL BODDIE*

Not exactly Rain Man, but . . . .

Spears, Simpson, Hilton: X17 Agency; Aguilera: Bauer Griffin.com; Osbourne: Gregg DeGuire/Wireimage.com/ Illustration by Gary French; Lohan: Dara Kushner/INF Goff.com/Newscom; Nicholls: Jeremy Goldberg/Corbis Outline

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Flav can pick up 57 channels!

DO YOU ROCH?

FLAVOR FLAV

Does the Public Enemy member and reality TV star indeed ROCK?

Ever trash a hotel room?
With the Beastie Boys, we used to break lamps and fill up the bathtub with water and dive in it.

Largest number of people you've woken up next to in a hotel bed?
Five.

Ever had a gambling fixation?
I love roulette, craps and C-Low.

Ever had a brush with the law?
I just got out of Riker's Island in 2003 for having too many traffic violations.

Worst rock & roll injury?
I fell 20 feet off a speaker and landed face first onto the stage once.

Worst tour horror story?
I was riding a moped in Italy and I flipped over the handlebars and broke both arms.

Ever wrecked a car?
I was looking at a girl walking down the street and Flavor Flav hit the back of a police car. My car was F-ed up to the bone.

Ever get lucky on an airplane?
I got so lucky once that I got to fly the plane.

Worst place you've ever been sick?
Red Lobster. Someone at another table threw up and it started a chain reaction.

Stupidest thing you've ever eaten?
A booger.

VERDICT

CRASHING INTO POLICE CARS? PUKING AT RED LOBSTER? FLAV REDEFINES WHAT IT MEANS TO ROCK!

→ FLAVOR FLAV IS CURRENTLY STARRING IN THE VH1 REALITY SERIES *STRANGE LOVE* WITH BRIGITTE NIELSEN.

NEWS ROUNDUP

MADONNA and longtime manager Caresse Henry have parted ways, reportedly because her affair with the singer's bodyguard broke the Kabbalah's rules of monogamy.

EMINEM is alleged to have spent nearly $120,000 on face cream during a recent trip to the U.K. The rapper ordered massive amounts of the M ACTIV beauty products, billed as "active weapons against the skin aging" from Saks Fifth Avenue in London.

KEVIN SPACEY has praised JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE's acting skills in the pair's forthcoming movie, *Edison*. "We did have a very nice time working together," he added.

WORD!

"She's got double D's! You can't cover those suckers up!"

JOE SIMPSON'S LATEST THOUGHTS ON DAUGHTER JESSICA'S BREASTS

Aiken: "No one wants me to sign their breast?"

McScrooge

Clay Aiken said to be a mean diva to kids on his Christmas tour

AMERICAN IDOL RUNNER-UP Clay Aiken may resemble one of Santa's elves, but at a New Jersey high school recently, he acted more like the Grinch.

On December 2, the pointy-eared pop star invited Clearview Regional High's Vocal Ensemble in Mullica Hill, N.J., to perform with him at a local stop on his Christmas tour. But when he arrived for rehearsal, his inner diva took over.

Aiken refused to have his photo taken or to sign autographs, despite prior guarantees to the contrary. The meal he promised the students was two hours late. Less than an hour before show time, McDonald's Happy Meals finally showed up.

When one faculty member — recently named New Jersey's State Teacher of the Year — complained, Aiken allegedly had security escort her from the theater. Another teacher said she was hesitant to speak out because Aiken had threatened to "make trouble" if anyone "called the newspaper." She did anyway, and was suspended for six days.

The triple-platinum-selling singer also promised to make a donation to the school's music program in a ceremony after the show. When students opened the envelope he left them, it was empty.

The school's superintendent did find one bright side. At least the kids, many of whom want careers in the music industry, "got a taste of real-life show business," he said. Aiken declined to comment. *JOSH EELLS*

WEIRD BAND ALERT!

ORANGE CRUSH

LAW STUDENTS THINK *THE O.C.* IS "TOTALLY AWESOME"

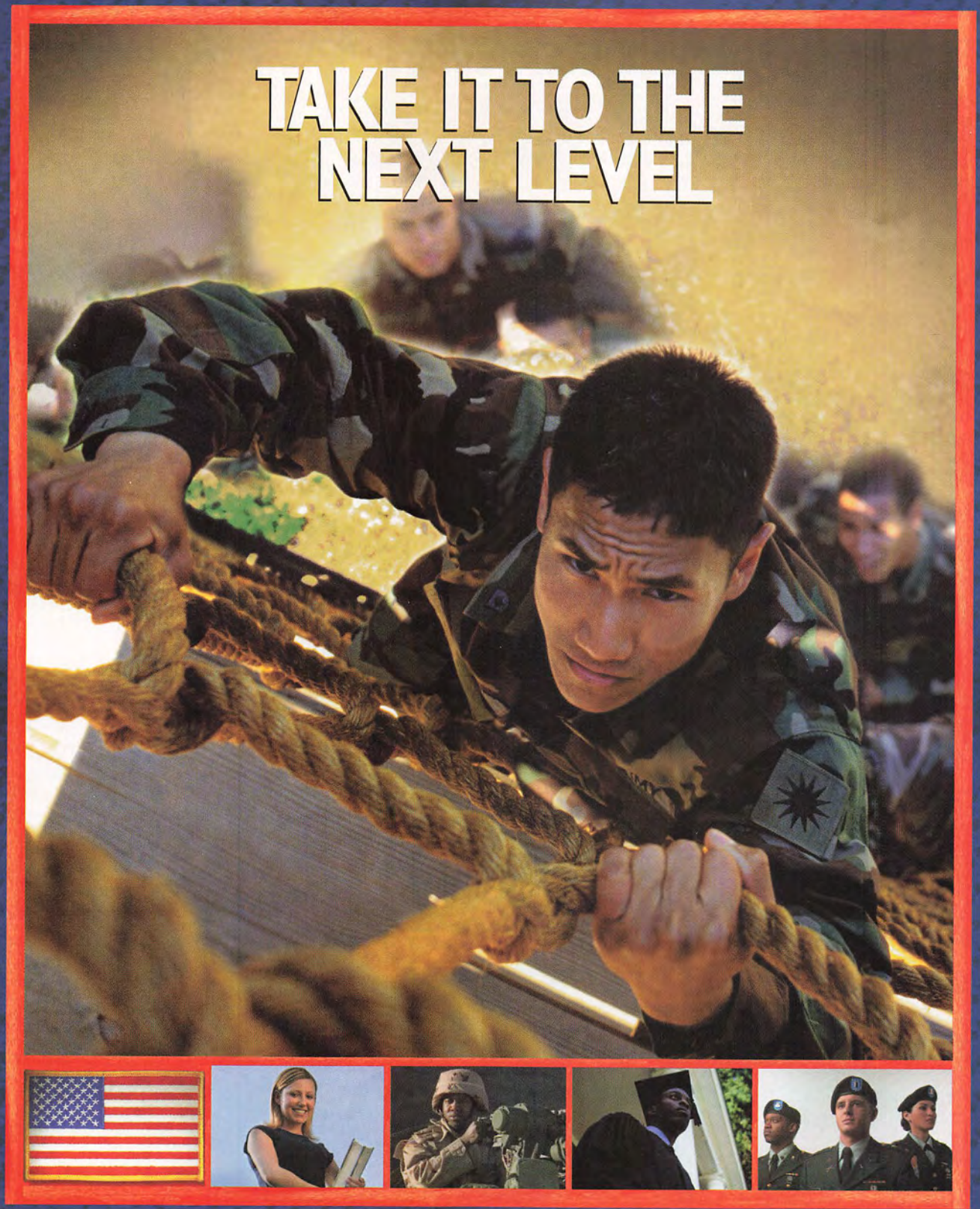
SO, A TRIBUTE ACT TO A TV SHOW?
Yes. The Berkeley, California, indie band writes songs inspired by the Fox drama's high-income hijinks and easy-on-the-eyes stars.

HOW DID THEY, LIKE, HOOK UP?
At law school, of course. Last year, at U.C. Berkeley's School of Law, guitarist John Kim, 26, started The O.C. at Boalt, a fan club devoted to the show. There, he met bassist Anne Caitriona Wood, 27, and keyboardist Ilona Turner, 25.

Band claim they "dress like characters from *The O.C.*"

HAVE THEY EVER PLAYED IN ORANGE COUNTY?
No, but they ended a San Diego gig with *The O.C.* theme song, "California," and "150 kids sang along like it was the National Anthem," says Kim. *STEVE LOWE*

Clockwise from top left: Flavor Flav: Kristin Callahan/LFI; Aiken: Splash News; Courtesy of Orange Crush; Courtesy of Fox; Simpson: Mark Sullivan/Wireimage.com; Illustration by Gary French



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THE NEXT BIG THING

LCD Soundsystem

A DOUGHY DANCE-ROCK MASTERMIND — WITH BRITNEY IN HIS ROLODEX — STEPS TO THE MIC

BY JONAH WEINER
PHOTOGRAPH BY TIM SOTER

JAMES MURPHY'S POSTURE is a mother's nightmare. The burly 34-year-old is sitting in his West Village office with legs crossed Indian-style and back hunched into a letter C. When he talks, he rocks excitedly, his eyes wide like a kid too close to the TV. For a figurehead of downtown hip, the guy is pretty goofy.

"I'm a total dork," he says. Like John Cusack in *High Fidelity*, Murphy's sense of identity is indivisible from his record collection. Spend five minutes with him and you're likely to receive an education in krautrock, acid house and the virtues of Black Sabbath's approach to mixing bass.

After a stint as a sound engineer, the New Jersey native co-founded the influential disco-punk label DFA in 2001, prompting calls from artists as varied as the Rapture and Britney Spears. Now he's releasing the debut from his pet project, LCD Soundsystem, which is full of "grumpy songs about music," he deadpans.

Though Murphy's lyrics — assaults on trend-obsessed fans and lackluster parties — resemble the rants of a jaded DJ, his music rockets and throbs. Augmented live by a full band, including keyboardist Nancy Whang (pictured), LCD make an irresistible racket aimed directly at the hips. "Making music seems really self indulgent," he says. "But making people dance seems honorable."

The album isn't all club jams. "Movement" taps the synth-thrash of '70s art-psychos Suicide, while "Never As Tired As When I'm Waking Up" recalls "Dear Prudence." This appetite for different sounds goes back to 1974, when preschool-aged Murphy made songs out of tape-recorded refrigerator hum. "I was a very avant-garde 4-year-old," he chuckles. [BLENDER]

OUT NOW LCD SOUNDSYSTEM *DFA*

ALL ABOUT ME!

NAME
James Murphy

OBSESSIONS
Good bed linen.

TYPICAL NIGHT OF DEBAUCHERY INCLUDES...
Mistakenly drinking a bottle of bourbon, then uncontrollably drinking a bottle of champagne.

IDEAL VALENTINE'S DAY
My wife, Xanax, champagne, backgammon, a dog and a farmhouse. That's romance!

AN IRRESISTIBLE RACKET, AIMED DIRECTLY AT THE HIPS.

42_"When she's dancing in the white boots/it makes me go insane."

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#16 AVRIL LAVIGNE

CURRENT AGE	20
AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY	77

CATEGORY	YEARS ADDED/SUBTRACTED
White female	+3
Canadian (Canucks have a longer life expectancy than Americans)	+2
Born and raised in a small, rural town (pop. 5,000)	+3
Pre-stardom struggles with self-confidence and artistic identity	–6
Effective stress management (skates, mall-shops, writes, spends time with boyfriend)	+4
Self-proclaimed victim of distorted music press (antagonistic me-against-the-world attitude causes anxiety)	–1
Has confidante and mentor (Chantal Kreviazuk)	+1
Life-on-the-road lifestyle (poor eating and sleeping habits, travel blues, visiting strange places and faces)	–3
Band provides family-like support system	+1
Smokes cigarettes	–4
Alcohol used in moderation, mostly	+2
Spiritual (musical talent fostered in church choir)	+3
ESTIMATED LIFE EXPECTANCY	82

PROJECTED YEAR OF DEATH	2067

GERONTOLOGIST DR. DEMKO SAYS: "Avril has achieved personal and career success resulting in self-confidence and a mature outlook on life. All this amounts to a long life expectancy."

NEWS ROUNDUP

JENNIFER LOPEZ reduced her acting fee by nearly $8 million after back-to-back bombs *Gigli* and *Jersey Girl*.

THE DARKNESS bought a sheep farm worth over $1 million in the tiny English village of Spooner Row. "We don't get many stars around here," admitted a resident.

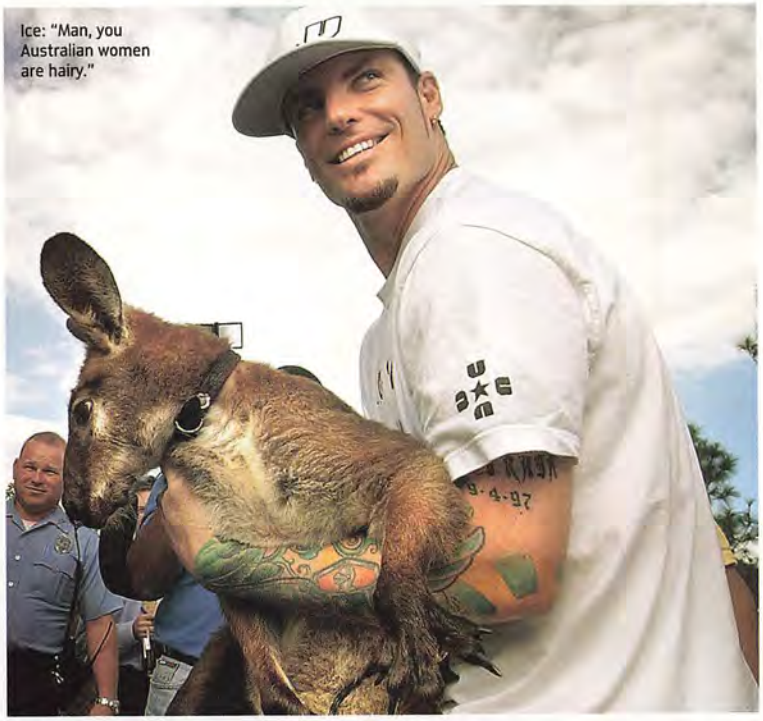
PINK is planning on turning her private diaries into a movie called *The Diary of Pink*. The singer said the words the journals contained were "shocking, inspiring and, above all, true to my heart."

MADONNA has admitted that motherhood is taking a toll on her creativity. "I'm exhausted," she complained.

WORD!

"It made us feel good about our relationship again."

JESSICA SIMPSON'S REACTION TO THE HIGH RATINGS OF HER AND NICK'S CHRISTMAS SPECIAL.


Ice: "Man, you Australian women are hairy."

Rescued!

Vanilla Ice finds wayward and rampaging pet wallaroo and goat

RAPPER AND *THE SURREAL Life* star Vanilla Ice was recently reunited with his pet wallaroo, Bucky Buckaroo, and goat, Pancho, after they escaped from a southeast Florida home in November.

Ice, whose real name is Robert van Winkle, was out of town when the animals freed themselves from a babysitting relative's gated enclosure. After several days investigating the wooded environs of St. Lucie County, Bucky Buckaroo blew his cover when he scratched a woman's car, prompting a call to local animal-control officials.

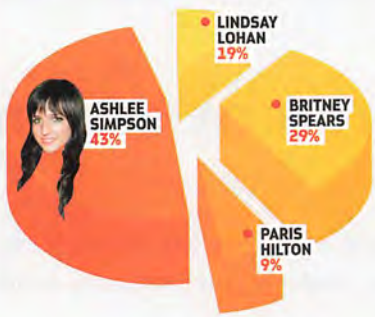
"They get more attention here than they do at home," Ice said as he collected his pets and paid a $220 fine for expired wildlife permits. "They had quite an adventure." *LAUREN HARRIS*

BLENDER'S BURNING QUESTION

WE ASK! YOU ANSWER!

WHICH OVERSTRESSED POP STAR WILL MOST LIKELY START EATING BIRDSEED AND TALKING TO INANIMATE OBJECTS?

SURVEY SAYS



READER WISDOM

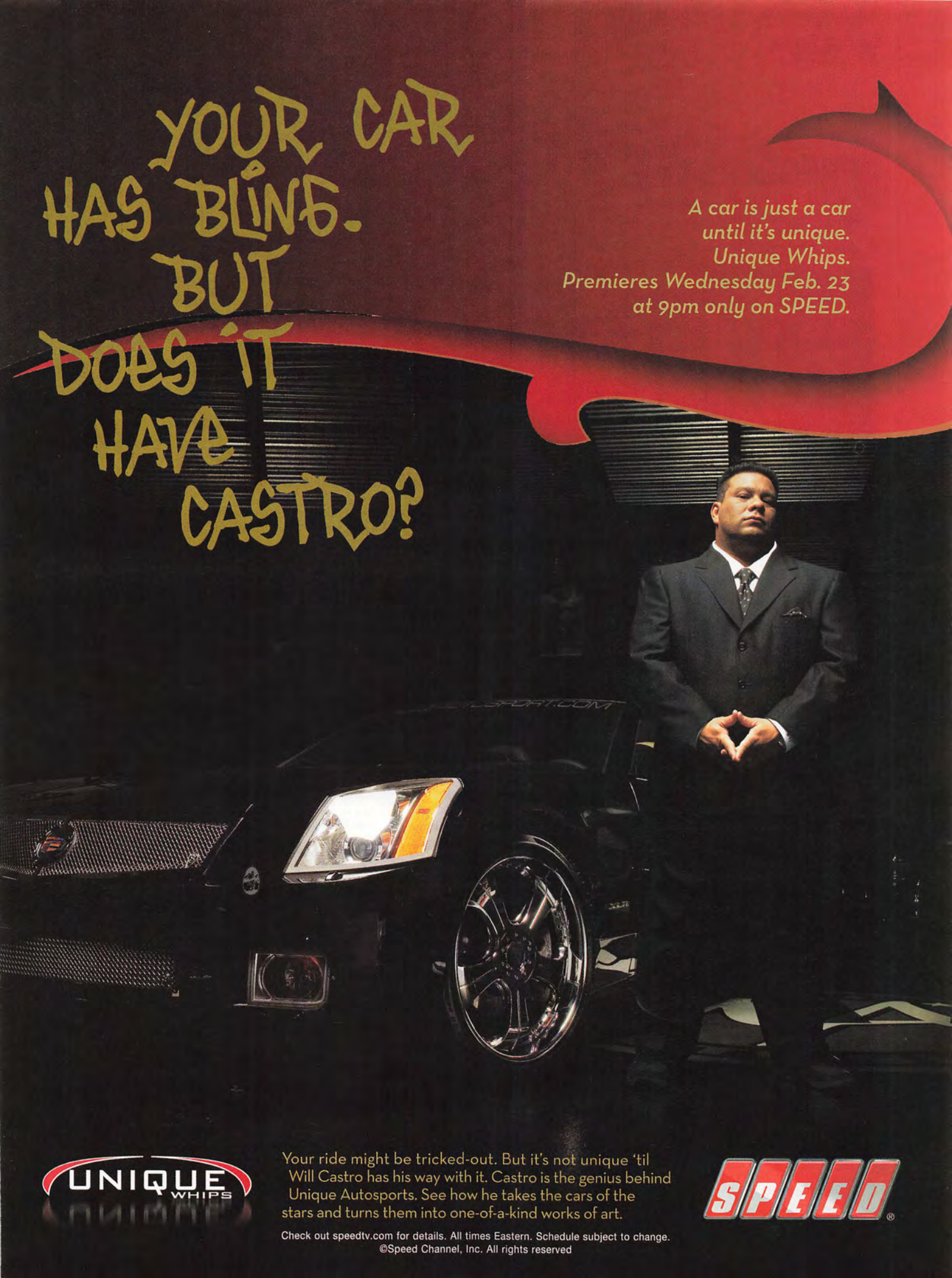
"Given Ashlee's 10-percent-of-all-she-owns parents and her chronic mullet, she'll soon be lining her apartment with newspaper and talking to her Slinky."

BLAKE KILLIAN, RIVER RIDGE, LA

Log on to Blender.com for April's "BURNING QUESTION."

One deserving reader will have his or her comment published in the next issue and win a Motorola V265 cellphone!

Lavigne: Mark Weiss/Angles/ContourPhotos.com; Vanilla Ice: TCPalm.com; Jessica Simpson: Kevin Mazur/Wirelmage.com/Illustration by Gary French; Ashlee Simpson: Kevin Mazur/Wirelmage.com


YOUR CAR HAS BLING. BUT DOES IT HAVE CASTRO?
A car is just a car until it's unique. Unique Whips. Premieres Wednesday Feb. 23 at 9pm only on SPEED.
UNIQUE WHIPS
Your ride might be tricked-out. But it's not unique 'til Will Castro has his way with it. Castro is the genius behind Unique Autosports. See how he takes the cars of the stars and turns them into one-of-a-kind works of art.
SPEED
Check out speedtv.com for details. All times Eastern. Schedule subject to change.
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PREGGERS?

Would **BRITNEY SPEARS** commit these pregnancy no-no's if she were carrying Kevin's third child? No, right?

NOVEMBER 21 Britney gets sushi from Nobu! (Raw fish may contain bacteria.)

DECEMBER 1 Britney enjoys a cigarette with her puppy Bit Bit! (Smoking increases chance of miscarriage.)

DECEMBER 10 Britney bleaches her hair blond! (Chemicals may cause birth defects.)

NEWS ROUNDUP

THE DAVE MATTHEWS BAND sewage stink continues. Nancy Todor has sued the band for drenching her in "brownish-yellow liquid human waste" that made her "physically ill and extremely nauseous." As her tour boat floated under the band bus's effluent pipe, she was busy celebrating her 43rd birthday.

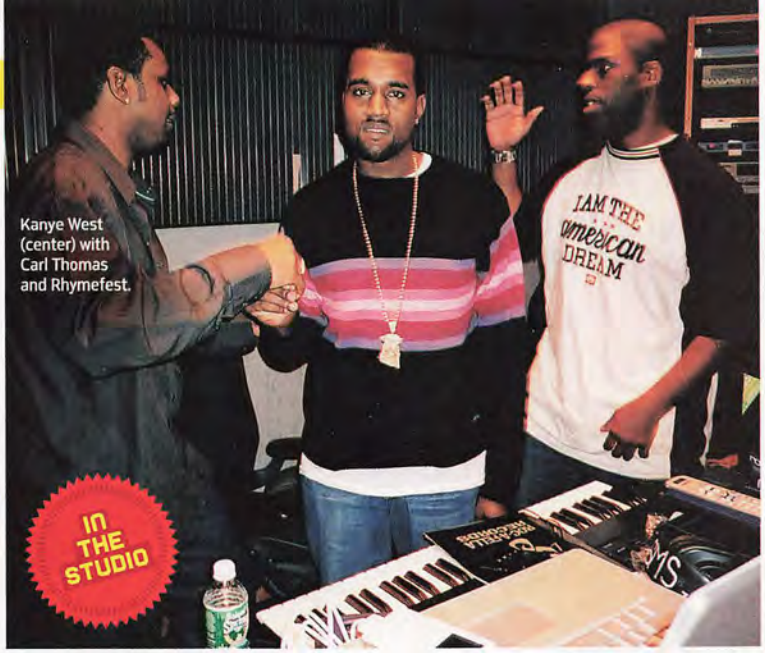
GENESIS have hit out at music fans for ignoring the band's back catalogue. "We've been overlooked," said guitarist Mike Rutherford. Keyboard player Tony Banks added, "We don't have many friends."

CHRISTINA AGUILERA is hoping to incorporate Indian classical music influences into her next album.

WORD!

"Somebody dared to ask me. Ha! Like, 'No!'"

JACK WHITE'S REACTION TO BEING ASKED TO PERFORM ON LINDSAY LOHAN'S DEBUT



Kanye West (center) with Carl Thomas and Rhymefest.

"Kiss My Ass!"

That's what Kanye West tells *Blender* when we ask about his new album

"I'M NOT JUST trying to be number one," says hip-hop mastermind Kanye West from Sony Studios in New York. "I'm trying to be forever — I want my place in history."

He's telling *Blender* about his goals for *Late Registration*, the follow-up to his 2004 debut, *College Dropout*. It's set to drop sometime this summer, but West isn't sure when it will be finished. "I'm probably 35% done," he guesses reluctantly. "But that's like asking an artist about his painting, 'How many oils do you want to use?' When I hear the magic, I'll know it's complete."

West is equally mum on whom he's working with, though he does confirm rumors of one unlikely collaboration. "Yeah, I did a song with John Mayer," he says. "It sounds good." Care to elaborate? "Uh . . . the drums sound good."

If West seems hesitant to reveal too much, it may be because expectations are so high. (His debut went double platinum and earned seven Grammy nods, including Album of the Year.) Or it may be that West has a bone to pick with *Blender*, who named him 2004 Artist of the Year.

"*Blender* gave my album four stars out of five," he says, before adding sarcastically, "yeah, that definitely says love. Would you give your grandmother four stars?" When *Blender* suggests that four stars is nothing to be ashamed of, West is quick to disagree. "There'd be nothing to be ashamed of if it was a four-star album. But it was a five-star album. So y'all can kiss my ass."

West adds, imitating *Blender* playfully: "'Um, yeah, we know we slighted your masterpiece, but how's the next one going?'" He laughs. "Fuck y'all!" *JOSH EELLS*

ALL ABOUT MY ALBUM

ARTIST
Kanye West

STUDIO
Sony Studios, New York

PRODUCED BY
Kanye West

LAST RECORD
College Dropout (2004)

NEW RECORD
Late Registration (2005)

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

<< BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB are self-producing their *Americana LP* at Hollywood's Sandbox, due this summer.

SLEATER-KINNEY are finishing up their Sub Pop debut at Tarbox Road Studios in Upstate New York, due on May 24.

ALL-AMERICAN REJECTS are at Bay 7 Studios in San Francisco recording the follow-up to their gold-selling, self-titled debut.

THE FIERY FURNACES are holed up at Key Club studios in Michigan recording the follow-up to last year's *Blueberry Boat*, due in late spring.

West: Tim Soter; Spears, top to bottom: X17 Agency.com; Bauer Griffin.com; X17 Agency.com; Jack White: Kevin Mazur/Wirelmage.com; Illustration by Gary French

IN THE CITY
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JEANS CO.
plugg.com

USEFUL TIPS FROM THE STARS

HOW TO...

Build a Wine Collection

Rapper and self-described 'hood wine connoisseur **N.O.R.E.** teaches you how to impress the ladies by replacing that pony keg with some quality vino.

BY STEVE KANDELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

1 DITCH THE HOOCH

"People make fun of me for being a 'hood wine connoisseur, but wine is cooler than Hennessy. The big advantage is you can OD on wine and not have a hangover. Plus, you can drink it during a meeting, and women respond perfectly to wine. If you give them vodka, they know you're just trying to hump them."

2 DON'T OVERDO IT

"Wine cellars are cool, but we 'hood winos don't buy more than we can fit in our fridge. Maybe five bottles total. You don't need souvenir bottles to show off – wine is meant to be drunk. Don't spend more than $60. The most I have ever spent for a bottle was at Olive Garden – $100 for a red wine that usually costs $40."

3 DON'T BE CHEAP

"My man E-40 drinks $4 gallons of Carlo Rossi. But if the bottle has a twist-off cap, it's like cheap beer, and I do not recommend that. Better to splurge on an $18 bottle of Cavit, which I think is a bit stronger than most wines. Don't forget about a good bottle opener, the more expensive the better, so it don't break."

4 SOUND FANCY

"In general, you'll want white wine with chicken or seafood, red wine with red meat, and if you want to party, get champagne. Personally, I'm a white wine drinker – Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon Blanc. And I like all my wine chilled, even red wine. My favorite is called Santa Margarita – it's so sweet, it gets you saucy."

N.O.R.E.'S NEW ALBUM, *NOREMINACLE* (ROC-A-FELLA), IS OUT NOW.

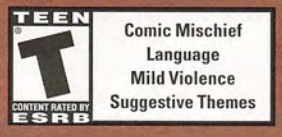
THE EPIC JAK TRILOGY IS COMING TO ITS DRAMATIC CONCLUSION.
REST ASSURED, IT WON'T END LIKE THIS.

JAK 3™

The conclusion,

the answers,

the end of the epic.



PlayStation.2

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PLAY IN OURS.

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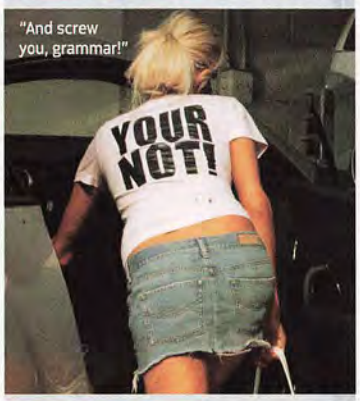
Paris: "Screw you, paparazzi!"



"And screw you, grammar!"

HAWT!

Paris sports grammatically challenged T-shirt

HABITUALLY FAMOUS PARIS Hilton wears a T-shirt bearing misspelled slogans while running errands in Beverly Hills. THATS HOT! [sic] is emblazoned on the front and YOUR NOT! [sic] on the back.

The high school graduate recently filed an application with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to copyright her catchphrase "That's hot," listing products such as body oils, prepaid magnetically encoded calling cards and kitchen utensils as potential bearers. *NOEL BODDIE*

WHAT'S IN FRED'S HEAD?

"The spirit inside of me is a predator of energy and balance."

A RANDOM THOUGHT TAKEN FROM FRED DURST'S BLOG

NEWS ROUNDUP

ALICIA KEYS has revealed that, when choosing a stage name to replace her given surname, Cook, one moniker she considered was Alicia Wild. "That sounds like a stripper," she groaned.

DESTINY'S CHILD manager Mathew Knowles has admitted that he does not approve of his daughter's association with JAY-Z. "I don't care for him at all," he said.

USHER has denied he is planning to marry girlfriend NAOMI CAMPBELL. "Marriage doesn't even exist in my vocabulary," he said.

WORD!

"They're fun. They just seem wilder. It's almost like they don't get to play a lot."

TOMMY LEE ON HEAVYSET WOMEN

LIFE AFTER ROCK

Iyall in 1985 and today (right), strangely failing to age.

DEBORA IYALL

OF ROMEO VOID

THEN
VOCALS
1979 TO 1985

"BEING IN ROMEO Void was a whirlwind of stimulation, collaboration, traveling, truck stops at 3 A.M., crawfish in Louisiana and smoke-filled rooms in Berlin. It was incredible.

"When we first heard 'Never Say Never' on the radio, we were driving outside Los Angeles. We started screaming out the windows, singing along. I felt like a sly cat, like I was getting away with something. I'm not a classic beauty, and yet I had power.

"Why did the band break up? Partly internal stress. We were getting told by the record company, 'C'mon, come up with a hit. Don't you have any more sex lyrics?' We weren't as savvy as bands are now. In our day, *marketing* was a dirty word. We were more like, 'Live fast, die young and leave a pretty corpse.'

"I started taking classes at the San Francisco Art Institute. I fell in love with drawing, and I ended up buying an etching press. I eventually taught printmaking at a cultural arts center.

"I moved to Palm Springs in 2000 and contacted the local Agua Caliente Cultural Museum. As an outreach specialist, I go out and talk to kids about how the Cahuilla, a Native American tribe, lived off the desert. I do hikes in the canyons where I show the children medicinal plants and peapods used for baskets.

"IN OUR DAY, *MARKETING* WAS A DIRTY WORD."

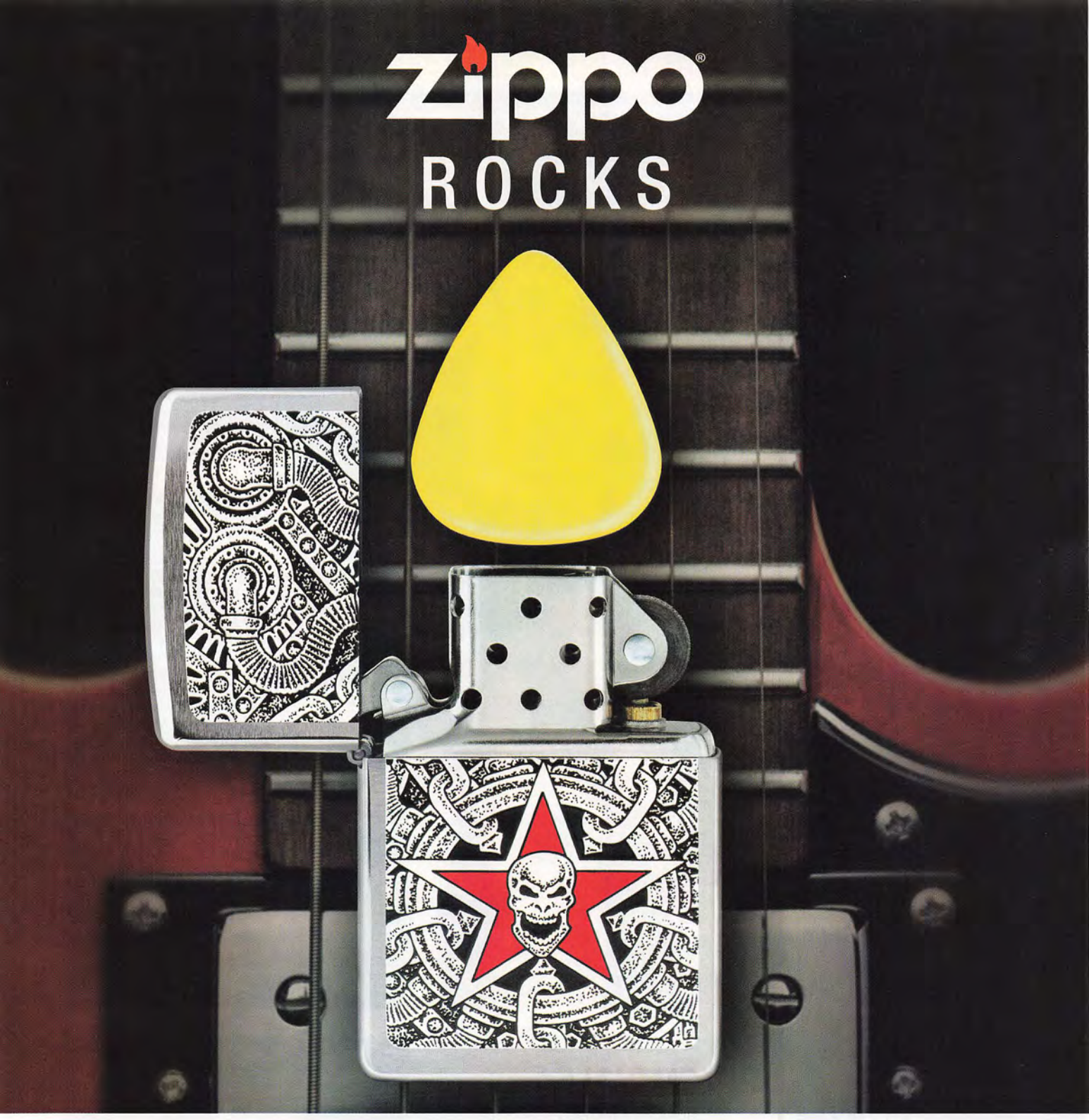
"For the Arts Council of San Bernardino County, I put on shadow plays in low-income neighborhoods and paint murals in boys and girls clubs. I also have a studio that I work out of called the Twentynine Palms Creative Center, where we teach classes to both kids and adults.

"I wish I had more money, but I live in a beautiful place and I can finally have a dog again! And I still surprise people with how bawdy I am. That's fun!"

NOW
ARTIST, EDUCATOR
TWENTYNINE PALMS, CALIFORNIA

AS TOLD TO JON REGARDIE

Hilton: X17 Agency; Romeo Void: Fabio Nosotti/Corbis; Iyall: Courtesy of Debora Iyall; Durst: Steve Granitz/WireImage.com



The fans choose the bands on the 2005 Zippo Hot Tour, as unsigned local rockers battle it out online and on stage in selected cities nationwide. The winner gets an A&R showcase with Capitol Records, a new equipment package and an opening spot with a national headliner this November. For more details on breaking the next big band and the chance to win cool prizes, visit **zippohottour.com**.

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ACTING!

MRS. NICK LACHEY GETS OUT OF CLOTHES, INTO CHARACTER

TAKING ON the role of Hazzard County hottie Daisy Duke, Jessica Simpson dons a bikini top, boots and short-shorts for her big-screen debut, *The Dukes of Hazzard*. After months of intense exercise for the remake of the '80s TV show, the pop star decided to increase her multimedia empire. "I'm going to be doing an exercise video, just because it's fun, and why not?" she said.

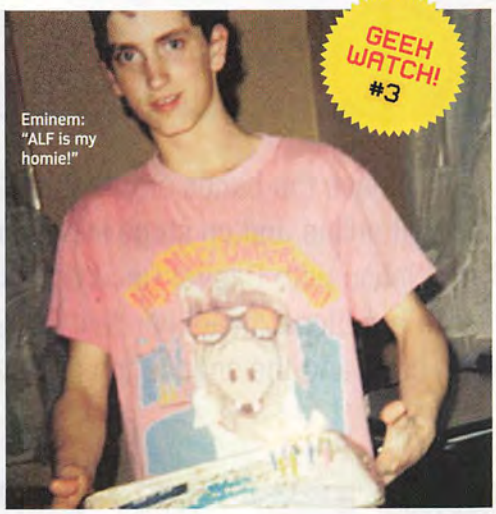
EM ♥ ALF

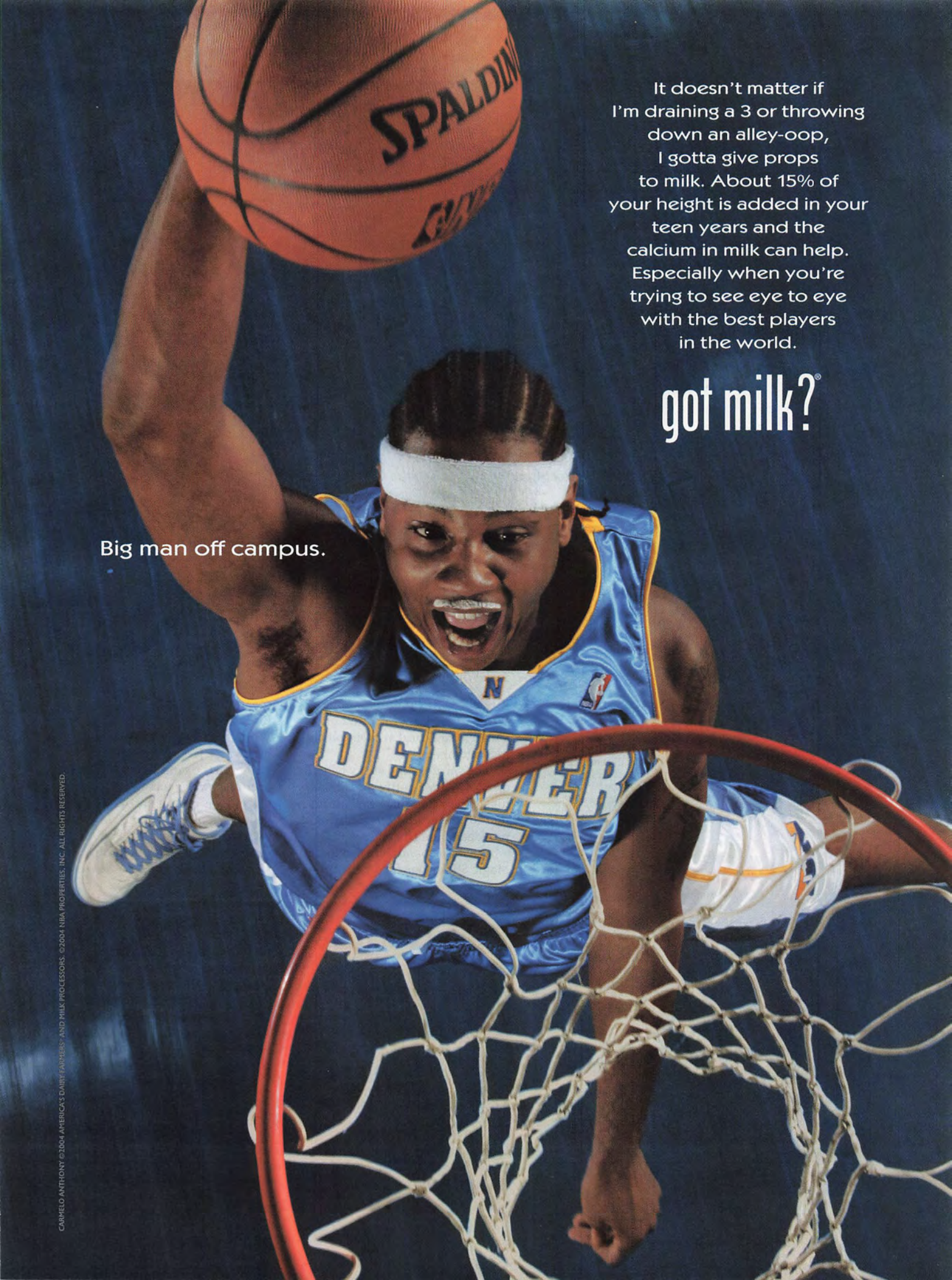
IRONIC OR UNIRONIC T-SHIRT? YOU DECIDE!

BLENDER HAS UNCOVERED a rare photo of a teenage Eminem.

In the vintage photograph, the rap superstar formerly known as Marshall Mathers — who once described himself as "a corny lookin' white boy, scrawny and always ornery" — proudly displays a homemade birthday cake.

Judging by his pink T-shirt, which says HEY, NICE UNDERWEAR!, the rapper was also a fan of the oh-so-gangsta '80s sitcom *ALF*, about a cat-eating alien from the planet Melmac. *JOSH EELLS*




It doesn't matter if
I'm draining a 3 or throwing
down an alley-oop,
I gotta give props
to milk. About 15% of
your height is added in your
teen years and the
calcium in milk can help.
Especially when you're
trying to see eye to eye
with the best players
in the world.
got milk?®
Big man off campus.
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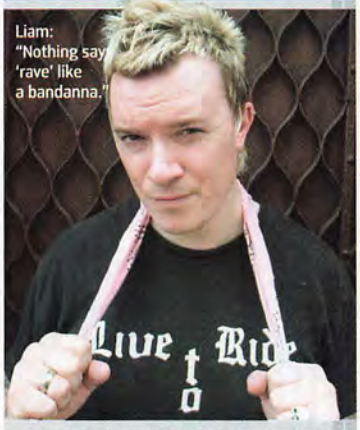
WHAT'S IN YOUR BAG?



LIAM HOWLETT
OF THE PRODIGY

Rebel Rebel Records, 319 Bleecker St., New York

PUBLIC IMAGE LTD.
THE GIRLS WHO DROVE ME TO TEA
"PiL had the attitude of the Sex Pistols, but more evolved musically. It was a brave record. It was less punk, but more punk in attitude."

WHITEY
LEAVE THEM ALL BEHIND
"Best record I've heard in the last year. Electronic music is too clean right now. This has a punk disco sound – really nasty, really analog."

PUBLIC ENEMY
YO! BUM RUSH THE SHOW
"It's just so intelligent. And it didn't sound like anything else before it. It had a rawness and a realness. I still love this record."

THE SPECIALS
THE SPECIALS
"I became aware of music with this record. They had the punk attitude, but with a groove. It just had a huge impact on me."
LAUREN HARRIS

→ THE PRODIGY'S NEW ALBUM, *ALWAYS OUTNUMBERED NEVER OUTGUNNED* (MAVERICK), IS OUT NOW.

OBITS

TERRY MELCHER, 62, Nov. 19, in Beverly Hills, after a battle with cancer. Key contributor to the 1960s California rock sound. Melcher, son of Hollywood star Doris Day, produced the Byrds on such groundbreaking folk-rock hits as "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "Turn, Turn, Turn" and re-emerged in 1988, writing the Beach Boys' "Kokomo."

CY COLEMAN, 75, Nov. 18, in New York, of heart failure. Broadway composer and songwriter who penned such pop standards as "Witchcraft" and "The Best Is Yet to Come." His songs have been recorded by Frank Sinatra, Nat "King" Cole, Tony Bennett and Ella Fitzgerald.

GENE GREIF, 50, Nov. 20, in New York. Artist who designed dozens of album covers as a staffer for CBS. His most influential was the Clash's *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, with its fake Japanese lettering and collage layout providing a blueprint for punk album art to come. Cause of death was hepatitis C, contracted from a blood transfusion after a 1977 car accident.

Creamy!

Jack White rubs peanut butter on rock pal

WHITE STRIPES frontman Jack White rubbed peanut butter on a man's bare chest at a Detroit club in September.

The shirtless and sticky beneficiary of White's nutty spread was his nephew Ben Blackwell, drummer for the headliners of the night, punk band the Dirtbombs.

When the band returned to the Magic Stick stage for an encore — a cover of the Stooges' song "Dirt" — Blackwell took the mic to sing. White, meanwhile, approached him with a jar of Skippy and slathered the sandwich spread all over Blackwell's torso.

"He was calling me out on doing an imitation of Iggy Pop," Blackwell tells *Blender*, alluding to Pop's habit of smearing peanut butter on himself in the late '60s. *LAUREN HARRIS*

HIGH VOLTAGE

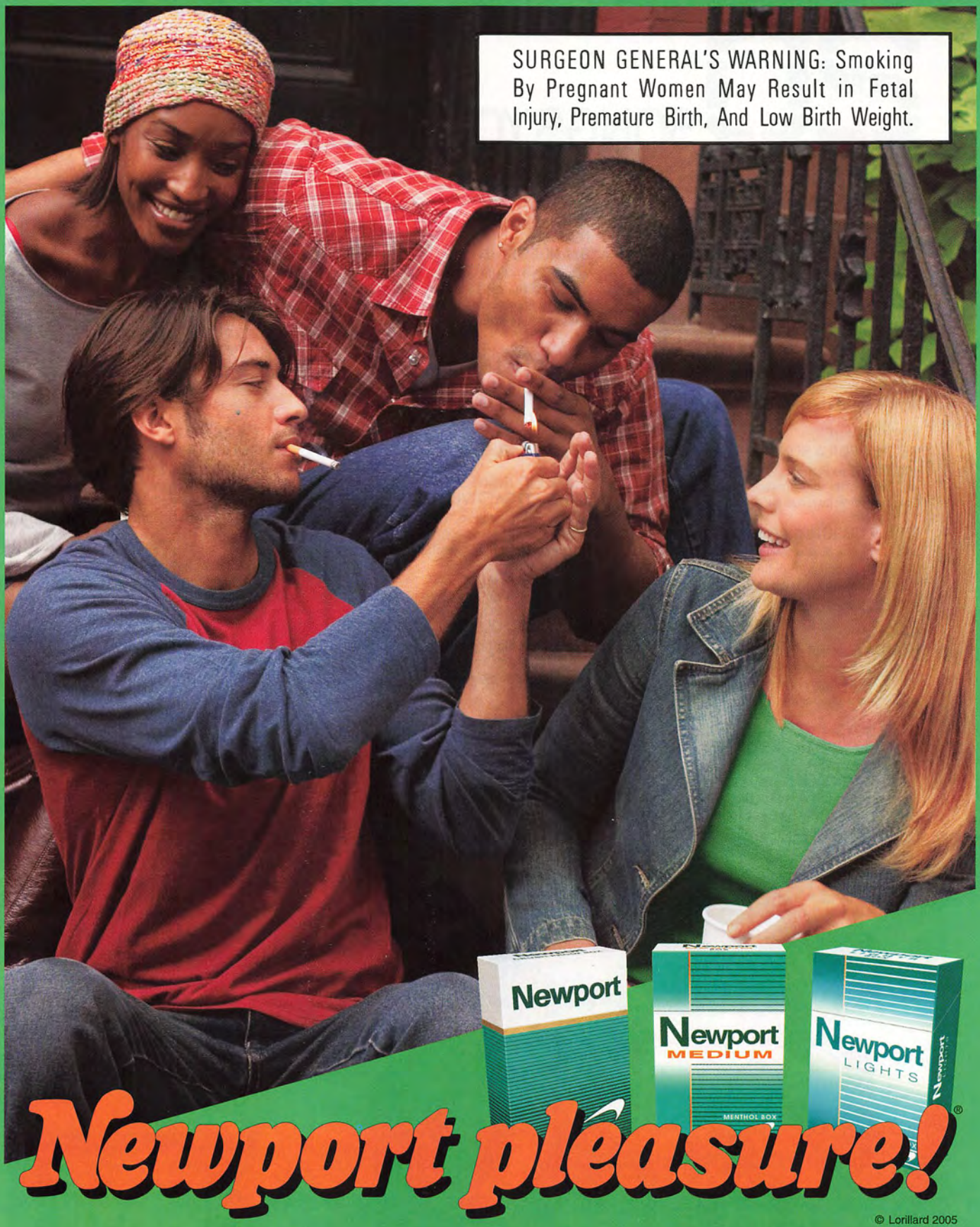
Electric Six rile Queen fans

Detroit rockers Electric Six anger Queen fans by depicting Freddie Mercury as a ghost who cavorts with poodles in their new video, a cover of "Radio Ga Ga."

Sporting a handlebar mustache, singer Dick Valentine dances in front of a grave bearing Mercury's real name, Frederick Bulsara, and has a drink at a bar with four poodles in the U.K.-only video. "E-mails from Queen fans have been vitriolic," says Valentine. "Queen wrote amazing songs. But they were also kind of absurd." *VICTORIA DESILVERIO*

Howlett: Tim Soter; Blackwell: Louisa Smith; White: Sara De Boer/Retna Ltd.

 "Stickin' to me, so sweet on you (uh-oh)/It's like peanut butter and jelly."



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20 SONGS YOU MUST DOWNLOAD THIS MONTH

1 OL' DIRTY BASTARD FEAT. RZA AND MASTA KILLAH
"OLD MAN" *[BOOTLEG]*
A *Sanford and Son*–sampling rarity on which Dirty raps the Big Mac song.

2 U2
"FAST CARS" *INTERSCOPE*
An available-only-in-the-U.K. meditation on love connections in the age of caller ID and Fox News.

3 MERCURY REV
"SECRET FOR A SONG" *V2*
This Buffalo, N.Y., indie troupe offer up windswept pop. Think Coldplay gone psychedelic.

4 SNOOP DOGG FEAT. JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
"SIGNS" *DOGGYSTYLE/STAR TRAK/GEFFEN*
Snoop and Justin T. trade absurd mack boasts: "She likes my tone, my cologne and the way I bone."

5 GREEN DAY
"HOLIDAY" *REPRISE*
Pop-punk's papas kick out a jaunty lament about dead soldiers and gay-baiting.

6 GETO BOYS
"MIND PLAYING TRICKS ON ME" *[VIDEO]*
At www.ifilm.com/ifilmdetail/2471689?htv=12, find this *Star Wars*–themed fan video for the 1991 gangsta hit – featuring a gat-toting Han Solo in a pimped-out Landspeeder!

7 NIRVANA
"BLANDEST" *GEFFEN*
This unearthed 1988 demo features Kurt Cobain's slurred, scathing come-ons and an addictive blues-grunge drone.

8 FANNYPACK
"SEVEN ONE EIGHT" *TOMMY BOY*
The "Cameltoe" girls are back with a raucous shout-out to NYC's outer boroughs that sounds as if it's being broadcast from a Wild West saloon.

9 DIAMOND NIGHTS
"GIRLS ATTRACTIVE" *KEMADO*
Sounds like "White Wedding," only about a smoking-hot girl with "rubbing alcohol" dripping from her hips.

10 CAM'RON FEAT. KANYE WEST AND SYLEENA JOHNSON
"DOWN AND OUT" *DIPLOMATS/ROC-A-FELLA*
One of hip-hop's iciest thugs threatens to play "razor tag" with your face over hard-hitting Kanye-soul.

11 GWEN STEFANI
"LUXURIOUS" *INTERSCOPE*
The No Doubt star likens her love to Egyptian cotton and limos, over the slow-mo soul loop from "Big Poppa." Oddly hypnotic.

Gwen Stefani and her *Kill Bill*–inspired security team.

12 BRENDAN BENSON
"I FEEL LIKE MYSELF AGAIN" *V2*
Scuzzed-up, Cars-esque power pop from Jack White's favorite new singer-songwriter.

13 SONS AND DAUGHTERS
"HUNT" *DOMINO*
Franz Ferdinand's Scottish tourmates pump out snarling honky-tonk about crime and redemption.

14 CIARA
"ROLL WIT YOU" *CAPITOL*
The "Goodies" girl rips off Beyoncé, and it works – skip the new Destiny's Child album and snag this *Coach Carter* soundtrack nugget.

15 THE HOLD STEADY
"THE SWISH" *FRENCHKISS*
AC/DC riffs and smart-ass lyrics about pill popping from Beverly Hills to Shaker Heights.

16 ADAM RICHMAN
"BABY, I'VE CHANGED" *OR*
Hooky indie-pop about changing so much for a girlfriend, you're almost a trannie.

17 50 CENT
"DISCO INFERNO" *G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE*
Curtis Jackson tosses party-starter rhymes like confetti while Dr. Dre works a snake-charmer beat.

18 WILCO
"JUST A KID" *NICK/SIRE*
From the *SpongeBob* soundtrack, an anthem for all nonconformist toddlers and toddling grownups.

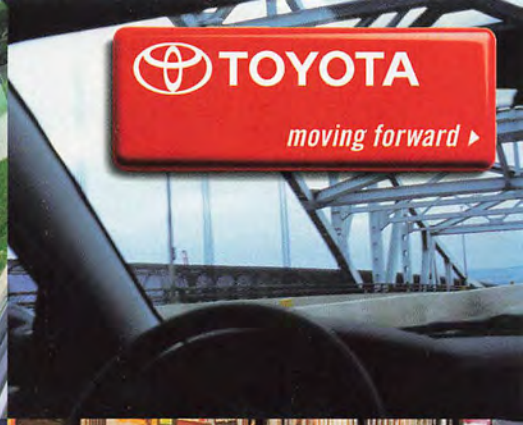
19 M.I.A.
"HOMBRE" *XL*
Horny, tribal electro from our favorite Sri Lankan fly girl.

20 MARIAH CAREY FEAT. SNOOP DOGG
"SAY SOMETHIN'" *DEF JAM*
Mariah and Snoop (him again?) get mellow over a smoove Neptunes boudoir jam.

ICON KEY

SADDOES
HIPSTERS
RAWK
AGING HIPSTERS
CRUNKY
SUPERSTAR POP

GO TO NAPSTER.COM TO DOWNLOAD THESE AND OTHER SONGS.



COROLLA S *Leave the to-do list at home* and fire up the 130-horsepower dual overhead cam VVT-i engine. Throw some CDs in the available 6-disc CD changer, slide back the power moonroof and you're set. You'll know where you're going when you get there. **toyota.com**

Shown with available rear spoiler and alloy wheels. ©2005 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

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REACTION O_2

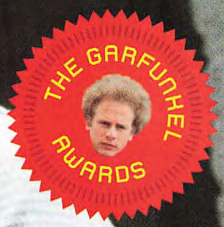
BAKING SODA AND PEROXIDE COMBINE. A REACTION OCCURS.
GET WHITER TEETH IN 14 DAYS. FEEL THE DIFFERENCE IN ONE.

You'll Love the Reaction.

MICHAEL STIPE P72 GREATEST SONG EVER P79 MY MUSIC P83 ASK BLENDER P86

INSIDER

KNOWING STUFF IS GOOD



HOLY HANGER-ON...IT'S

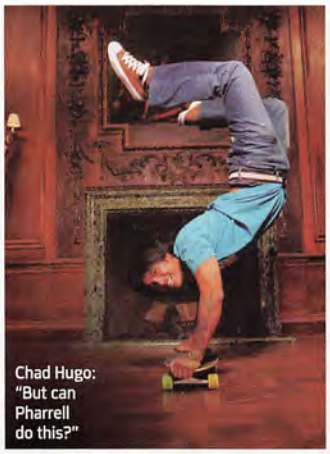
THE MOST AWESOMELY MEDIOCRE ARTISTS OF ALL TIME

Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis

THE B-LIST HALL OF FAME

DON'T WRITE THE SONGS? HAVE A MUSTACHE WITH "PERSONALITY"? THEN WE SALUTE YOU! IT'S THE FIRST-EVER GARFUNKEL AWARDS — DEDICATED TO THE GREATEST "OTHER GUYS" IN ROCK HISTORY.

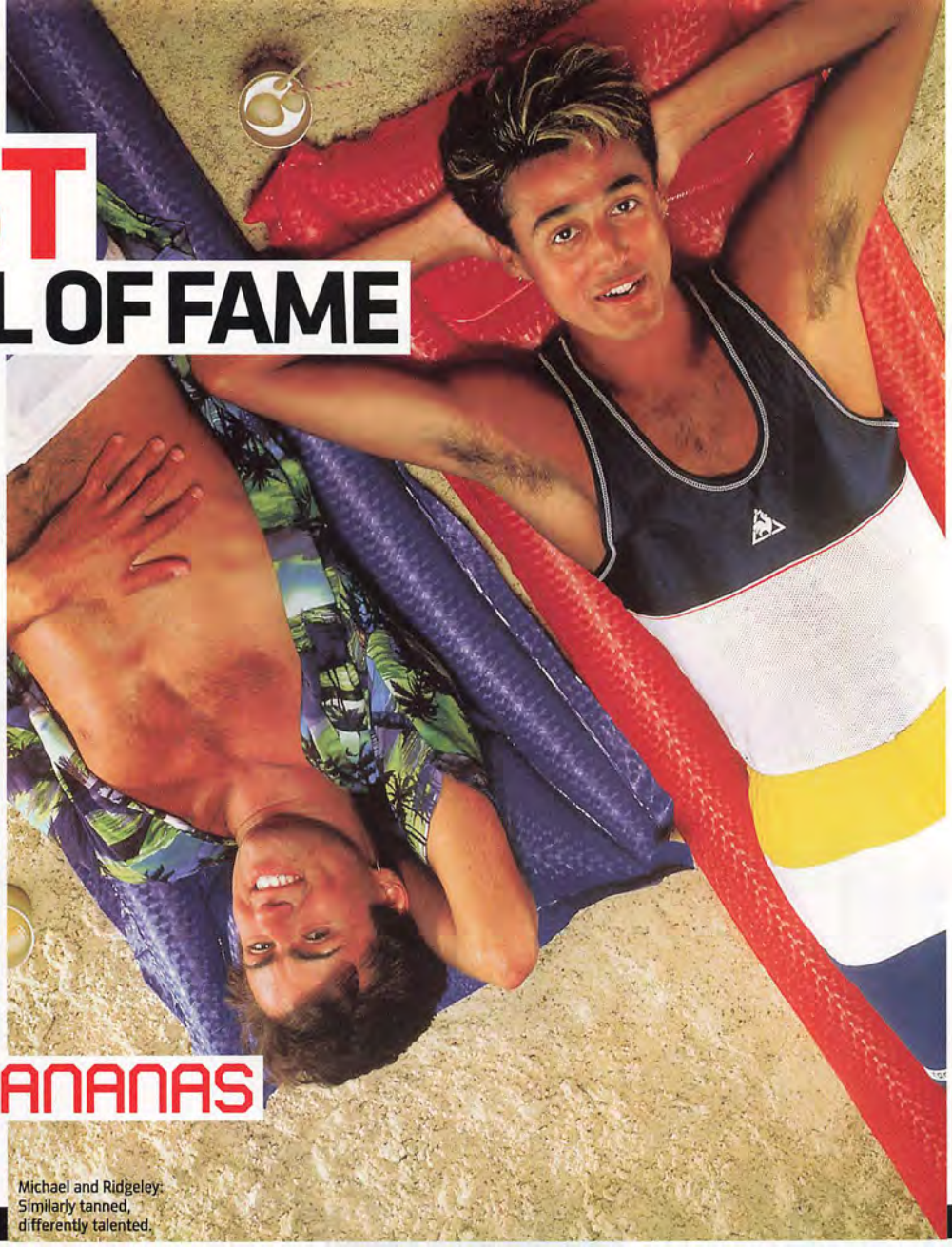
BY MIKE ALBO, CLARK COLLIS, ANDREW HARRISON, STEVE KANDELL, BEN MITCHELL, TONY POWER, BRIAN RAFTERY AND JONAH WEINER



Chad Hugo: "But can Pharrell do this?"

SECOND BANANAS

YOU KNOW THEIR FACES — AND MAYBE EVEN THEIR NAMES. BUT WHAT DO THEY *DO*, EXACTLY?



Michael and Ridgeley: Similarly tanned, differently talented.

THE CANADIAN ED MCMAHON

PAUL SHAFFER

BETTER KNOWN AS: David Letterman's chrome-domed bandleader and straight man since 1982. Shaffer has had a long career playing second banana to comedians, having served as a bit player on *SNL* and in *This Is Spinal Tap* as Artie Fufkin, Polymer Records. Best known for guffawing at his boss's one-liners and insisting on sitting in with all musical guests, no matter how artistically incompatible.

ROCK BOTTOM: Once recorded an album with TV's Greg Evigan (*My Two Dads, B.J. and the Bear*).

DIDJA KNOW? Improbably, Shaffer is a recent inductee into the National Black Sports & Entertainment Hall of Fame.

BEHIND-THE-SCENES B-BOY

CHAD HUGO

BETTER KNOWN AS: The no-name Neptune. Nothing wrong with settling down, but while Pharrell handpicks groupies, cranks out high-profile video cameos and designs his own clothes, Hugo stays in Virginia with his wife, two kids and a key-tar.

ROCK BOTTOM: In the Pharrell-saturated video for Snoop Dogg's No. 1 hit "Drop It Like It's Hot," Hugo appears onscreen for literally one second. N.E.R.D.s are one thing. Geeks are another.

DIDJA KNOW? Solo, Hugo produced the debut by Depeche Mode–obsessed Ethiopian singer Kenna.

THE SHAM OF WHAM!

ANDREW RIDGELEY

BETTER KNOWN AS: George Michael's straight man. Provided ass-shaking, nonmusical backup to Michael's songwriting skills. Post-breakup, started a racing career in Monaco, quitting after he crashed too many cars. Released solo album *Son of Albert* before becoming an eco-activist surfer.

ROCK BOTTOM: The 1990 single "Shake," a sad knockoff of Michael's own "Faith."

DIDJA KNOW? Is married to ex-Bananarama singer Keren Woodward. Meaning that even at home, he's still second Banana.

THE ORIGINAL SECOND FIDDLE

ART GARFUNKEL

BETTER KNOWN AS: The name after the ampersand. Simon wrote the songs and played the instruments; Art harmonized. They split in 1970; Paul's solo albums got the plaudits and the sales — Art had a big hit in England with the theme song to a film about animated rabbits.

ROCK BOTTOM: They appeared together again on *Saturday Night Live* in 1986 — in a skit where Simon can't remember his former partner's name.

DIDJA KNOW? An animated Art is in a *Simpsons* episode in which Lisa imagines playing in a concert of "second bests."

From left: Sarah A. Friedman/Corbis Outline; Gered Mankowitz

PRAYING FOR A REUNION TOUR

JC CHASEZ, JOEY FATONE, CHRIS KIRKPATRICK, LANCE BASS

BETTER KNOWN AS: Eighty percent of 'N Sync, a.k.a. the Timberlakettes. Sure, they've all kept busy since the last 'N Sync album — JC had a minor hit with *Schizophrenic*, Joey's been acting, Lance almost went into outer space, Chris . . . um . . . anyway, none of their stars has risen the way Justin Timberlake's has.

ROCK BOTTOM: Justin broke the news to his not-yet-officially-former bandmates in August that he has no interest in rejoining them.

DIDJA KNOW? The Spice Girls managed to pinch out one more album after their big gun, Ginger, bolted for a solo career. Yeah, we didn't know that either. Best of luck, fellas!

'N Sync (left to right): Guy, Guy, Justin, Fat Guy, Guy.

Hall and Oates: Never in danger of being "Oates and Hall."

OATES RELEASED THE WOEFULLY TITLED *PHUNK SHUI.*

THE CRUELLY SPURNED BIG MAN

CLARENCE CLEMONS

BETTER KNOWN AS: Springsteen's sax guy. Poached from James Brown's backing band in 1971, replacing the Boss's entire horn section and troupe of backing singers. Springsteen leans on Clemons on the sleeve of *Born to Run* and onstage would often kiss Clemons full on the mouth. Fired by phone in 1989 along with entire E Street Band. Reinstated in 1995.

ROCK BOTTOM: Role as informant/hair salon owner on *Nash Bridges* less celebrated than fellow E Streeter Steve Van Zandt's on *The Sopranos*.

DIDJA KNOW? Once counseled mentally handicapped children.

MOTOWN'S INVISIBLE MEN

THE PIPS

BETTER KNOWN AS: Those dudes with Gladys Knight. Other Motown vocal groups had cool names like the Miracles or the Supremes; mellifluous Merald Knight, William Guest and Edward Patten were lumbered with that wretched moniker by their first agent, James "Pip" Woods, dooming them to be Gladys's bitches for eternity.

ROCK BOTTOM: Commercial failure of 1977's Gladys-free album, *At Last . . . The Pips*. When Knight cut them loose in 1990 they did the sensible thing and quit.

DIDJA KNOW? Merald Knight was last spotted onstage at Caesars Palace in 2000, in has-beens' graveyard *Smokey Joe's Café*.

THE MAN IN BACK

JAZZY JEFF

BETTER KNOWN AS: The Fresh Prince's DJ. Even when his considerable turntable skills were selling millions of albums and snagging Grammys, Jeff Townes was the pauper to Will Smith's prince: Leading man Smith radiated sex-symbol confidence, while Townes wore geek glasses the size of Sequoia windshields. On TV, even Carlton upstaged him.

ROCK BOTTOM: When Smith became one of Hollywood's highest-paid stars, Jeff was left DJ-ing auto shows. "Sometimes success takes away your love of the music," he has said.

DIDJA KNOW? Jeff executive-produced Smith's 1999 solo disaster, *Willennium*.

THE SECRET 'STACHE

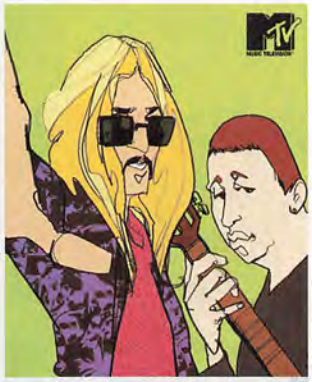
JOHN OATES

BETTER KNOWN AS: Daryl Hall's big-haired buddy. While in college, met the far more fetching Hall, launching a partnership rooted in AM-friendly soul and unintentional sexual ambiguity. Reduced to providing bug-eyed comic relief in the group's garish music videos. During band hiatuses, Oates used his time to collaborate with the likes of Icehouse and Tina B while Hall scored a hit solo album.

ROCK BOTTOM: Composing the score for a 1993 *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit video.

DIDJA KNOW? Gave his first solo record the woefully out-of-touch title *Phunk Shui*.

From left: Joseph Cultice/Corbis Outline; Lynn Goldsmith/Corbis



ARE YOU A SECOND BANANA?

COMPLETE THIS MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUIZ TO FIND OUT – BEFORE THAT EGOMANIACAL LEAD SINGER BEATS YOU TO IT.

1 **WHAT QUESTION DO YOU GET ASKED BY JOURNALISTS MOST OFTEN?**
a) "How do you cope with being so famous?"
b) "How do you cope with your frontman being so famous?"
c) "Could you get me some water?"

2 **WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE WAY YOUR BAND'S PROFITS ARE DISTRIBUTED?**
a) It seems fair and equitable.
b) You're being totally fucking reamed.
c) You were unaware that there were any profits.

3 **WHAT HAPPENED LAST TIME YOU WERE TOO SICK TO PLAY A SHOW?**
a) The rest of the band canceled.
b) The rest of the band played, but missed playing that song you wrote.
c) The rest of the band didn't notice.

4 **WHICH ROCK STARS DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH?**
a) Mick Jagger, Robert Plant, Justin Timberlake.
b) Ron Wood, Buckethead, Joey Fatone, the other two, what's-his-face and the *other* guy.
c) The dude who played a cowbell on "Don't Fear the Reaper."

5 **WHAT DO PEOPLE SAY WHEN THEY MEET YOU IN THE STREET?**
a) "I'm your biggest fan."
b) "I'm the biggest fan of your lead singer. Do you think you could get me his autograph?"
c) "Are you lost? Why are you holding a cowbell?"

CLARK COLLIS

IF YOU ANSWERED:

MOSTLY A'S: Congratulations: You're a rock A-lister, you preening, self-centered bastard.
MOSTLY B'S: Congratulations: You're a rock B-lister, you embittered, self-loathing malcontent.
MOSTLY C'S: Congratulations: You're the guy that hits the cowbell. Now, where's my water, bitch?

POOR RELATIONS

SCIENTIFIC PROOF THAT THERE REALLY IS A "LOSER" GENE

The Jacksons celebrate selling LaToya.

PUTTING THE "FUNK" IN "DYSFUNCTIONAL"

JERMAINE, MARLON, RANDY, TITO, JACKIE AND LATOYA JACKSON

BETTER KNOWN AS: The other Jacksons, eclipsed in 1966 when then-8-year-old Michael usurped lead vocals from Jermaine, who married Berry Gordy's daughter and left for an inconsequential solo career. Randy, Tito and Jackie are now session musicians. LaToya appeared naked in *Playboy*, endorsed a psychic phone line, released a song about 9/11 and accused father Joe of abusing her.
ROCK BOTTOM: Before reunion at Michael Jackson celebration in 2001, Marlon released a list of all the Jacksons hits Jermaine *didn't* appear on.
DIDJA KNOW? In 1991, Randy was sentenced to two years' probation for beating then-wife Eliza – now married to Jermaine.

SORRY, MRS. JACKSON!

LISA MARIE PRESLEY

BETTER KNOWN AS: The King's little princess. Her one painfully auto-biographical, Alanis-lite album, 2003's *To Whom It May Concern*, is still overshadowed by her deranged celebrity – with a drug habit at 14 and crazy marriages to Michael Jackson and Elvis soundalike Nic Cage (it lasted three months).
ROCK BOTTOM: Take your pick: the Diane Sawyer double-headed interview with Jacko on ABC ("Do we have sex? Yes! Yes! Yes!") or the turbulent Cage union (she threw a $65,000 engagement ring into the Pacific).
DIDJA KNOW? A portrait of her hangs in her house. Painted in blood!

THE TIMBERLAKE TWIN

KEVIN FEDERLINE

BETTER KNOWN AS: Britney's baggy-pantsed boy-toy. Former dancer who appeared in 2004's *You Got Served* before meeting Spears at an L.A. nightclub. Was about to have his second child when he and his wife-to-be embarked on a summer-long tour of hotel patios, shopping malls and 7-Eleven stores. Slated to appear on Spears's next album, despite total lack of musical experience.
ROCK BOTTOM: Likely to be determined by a Santa Monica divorce court in March 2006.
DIDJA KNOW? Cried to a Phil Collins CD on the night before his wedding.

SECOND-HAND BLONDE

HAYLIE DUFF

BETTER KNOWN AS: Hilary's older sister. The same hair but taller, the same ambitions but smaller, Haylie is constantly lurking somewhere behind the Disney princess. She doesn't seem to mind: Energetically bustin' moves behind Hilary in "Movie Surfers" or singing in her pop trio Trilogy, Haylie's biding time till her big break – in an upcoming movie with the promising title *Dishdogz*.
ROCK BOTTOM: Haylie was demoted from sibling to playing "Cousin Amy" on Hilary's hit show *Lizzie McGuire*.
DIDJA KNOW? She's currently doing commercials for Five Star school supplies.

From left: Illustration by John Jay; John Olson/Getty Images; Erin Patrice O'Brien/Corbis Outline

think about it

sample carton offer inside

the additive-free alternative

The fact is the tobacco in most cigarettes contains additives drawn from a long list of chemicals. In addition, other tobacco companies add inexpensive, lower grade tobacco components to their tobacco blends such as processed stems and reconstituted sheet tobacco.

consider the alternative

Natural American Spirit is made with 100% additive-free natural tobacco. No preservatives. No flavorings. No processed stems. We believe you have the right to know what is in your cigarette that's why we provide full tobacco ingredient disclosure. The only ingredient we use is the finest premium tobacco.

CENTRATE AND EXTRACT/ L-ARGININE/ ASCORBIC ACID/ L-ASPARTIC ACID/ BALSAM PERU AND OIL/ BAY OIL / BEESWAX RES
N, RESINOID, GUM AND ABSOLUTE/ BENZOPHENONE/ BENZYL ALCOHOL/ BENZYL BENZOATE/ BENZYL BUTYRATE/ BENZYL C
TANOL,3-METHYL-,BENZOATE/ 4(2-BUTENYLIDENE)-3,5,5-TRIMETHYL-2-CYCLOHEXEN-1-ONE/ BUTYL ACETATE/ BUTYL ALCO

464 additives commonly added by maj
WE ADD NONE OF THE

THYL BENZYL CARBINYL BUTYRATE/ 3,4-DIMETHYL-1,2-CYCLOPENTADIONE/ 4,5-DIMETHYL-3-HYDROXY-2,5-DIHYDROFUR
THYL-5,9-UNDECADIEN-2-ONE/ alpha-para-DIMETHYLBENZYL ALCOHOL/ alpha-alpha-DIMETHYLPHENETHYL BUTYRATE
ECALACTONE/ gamma-DODECALACTONE/ ETHYL ACETATE/ ETHYL ACETOACETATE/ EHTYL ALCOHOL/INCLUDING (SDA) NO.4
ACOL/ ETHYL HEPTANOATE/ ETHYL HEXANOATE/ 2-ETHYL-1-HEXANOL/ 3-ETHYL-2-HYDROXY-2-CYCLOPENTEN-1-ONE/ 5-ETH
OL/ ETHYL-2-METHYLBUTYRATE/ ETHYL METHYL PHENYLGLYCIDATE/ 2-ETHYL-3-METHYLPYRAZINE/ 3-ETHYL-2-METHYLPYR
L PHENYLACETATE/ ETHYL PROPIONATE/ ETHYL VALERATE/ ETHYL VANILLIN/ ETHYL VANILLIN GLUCOSIDE/ 4-ETHYLBENZAL
GREEK, EXTRACT, RESIN, AND ABSOLUTE/ FIG EXTRACT AND OLEORESIN/ FIG JUICE CONCENTRATE AND EXTRACT/ FOO
RBON OIL/ GERANYL ACETATE/ GERANYL BUTYRATE/ GINGER OIL AND OLEORESIN/ GLUCOSE/DEXTROSE/ L-GLUTAMIC AC
ACOL/ GUAR GUM/ 2,4-HEPTADIENAL/ gamma-HEPTALACTONE/ HEPTANOIC ACID/ 2-HEPTANONE/ 4-HEPTENAL/ HEPTYL A
EN-1-OL/ 3-HEXEN-1-OL/ cis-3-HEXEN-1-YL ACETATE/ cis-3-HEXENYL FORMATE/ HEXYL ACETATE/ HEXYL ALCOHOL/ HEXYL PH
FURANONE/ 4-HYDROXY-3-PENTENOIC ACID LACTONE/ HYDROXYCITRONELLAL/ 6-HYDROXYDIHYDROTHEASPIRANE/ 4-(p
RT SUGAR/ alpha-IONONE/ beta-IONONE/ ISOAMYL ACETATE/ ISOAMYL BENZOATE/ ISOAMYL BUTYRATE/ ISOAMYL CINNAMAT
OHOL/ ISOBUTYL CINNAMATE/ 2-ISOBUTYL-3-METHOXYPYRAZINE/ ISOBUTYL PHENYLACETATE/ alpha-ISOBUTYLPHENETHYL
ABSOLUTE/ LACTIC ACID/ LAURIC ACID (DODECANOIC ACID)/ LAVANDIN OIL/ LEMON OIL/ LEMONGRASS OIL/ LEVULINIC ACI
E/ LINALYL ACETATE/ LOVEAGE OIL AND EXTRACT/ L-LYSINE/ MACE POWDER, EXTRACT AND OIL/ L- MALIC ACID/ MALT AN
OIL/ para-MENTHA-8-THIOL-3-ONE/ METHIONAL/ MENTHOL AND L-MENTHOL/ MENTHYL ACETATE/ MENTHYL ISOVALE
ZINE/ 2-,5- OR 6-METHOXY-3-METHYLPYRAZINE (MIXTURE OF ISOMERS)/ para-METHOXYBENZALDEHYDE/ 2-METHOXY-PHE
YLPHENOL/ para-METHYL ANISATE/ METHYL ANISATE/ METHYL ANTHRANILATE/ METHYL BENZOATE/ METHYL-trans-2-BUTEN
PTEN-2-ONE/ METHYL-alpha-IONONE/ METHYL ISOVALERATE/ METHYL LINOLEATE (48%) METHYL LINOLEATE (52%)
NYLACETATE/ 2-METHYL-4-PHENYLBUTYRALDEHYDE/ 5-METHYL-2-PHENYL-2-HEXENAL/ METHYL 2-PYRROLYL KETONE/
TATE/ 3-METHYLBUTANOL 1-BENZOATE/ 2-METHYLBUTYRALDEHYDE/ 3-METHYLBUTYRALDEHYDE/ 2-METHYLBUTYRIC A
HYLPENTANOIC ACID/ METHYLPHENAL ESTER ACETIC ACID, 4(METHYLTHIO)METHYLPYRAZINE (MIXTURE OF ISOMERS)/
/ MIMOSA ABSOLUTE/ MOLASSES, BLACKSTRAP, SUGARCANE AND EXTRACT/ MONOAMMONIUM GLYCYRRHIZINATE/ MO
ADIEN-1-OL/ gamma-NONALACTONE/ NONANOIC ACID/ 2-NONANONE/ NONYL ALCOHOL/ NUTMEG POWDER AND OIL/ OAK MO
ma-OCTALACTONE/ OCTANAL/ OCTANOIC ACID/ 2-OCTANONE/ 2, trans-OCTENAL/ 1-OCTEN-3-OL/ OLEIC ACID/ OLIBANUM C
LLED ORANGE OILS AND TERPENELESS)/ ORRIS CONCRETE OIL AND ROOT EXTRACT/ PALMITIC ACID/ PATCHOULY OIL A
PEPPERMINT OIL TERPENELESS/ PETITGRAIN ABSOLUTE, OIL, AND TERPENELESS OIL/ 2-PHENETHYL ACETATE/ PHENETH
ALERATE/ PHENETHYL PHENYLACETATE/ 3-PHENYL-1-PROPANOL/ 4-PHENYL-3-BUTEN-2-ONE/ PHENYLACETALDEHYDE/ PH
NYL-2-PROPENOIC ACID/ PHOSPHORIC ACID/ alpha-PINENE/ PINE NEEDLE OIL/ PINEAPPLE JUICE CONCENTRATE/ PIPERON
LINE/ 2-PROPENIC ACID,3-PHENYL-,ETHYL ESTER/ 2-PROPENOIC ACID,3-PHENYL/ 2-PROPENOIC ACID,3-PHENYL-,PHENYI
COL/ 3-PROPYLIDENEPHTHALIDE/ PRUNE JUICE CONCENTRATE/ PYRIDINE/ PYROLIGNEOUS ACID AND EXTRACT/ PYRUVI
BACT/ RUM ETHER/ RUM AND RUM EXTRACT/ SAGE, SAGE OIL, POWDER AND OLEORESIN/ SALICYLALDEHYDE/ SANDALW
/ d-SORBITOL/ SPEARMINT OIL/ STORAX/ STYRAX EXTRACT, GUM AND OIL/ SUCROSE/ SUCROSE OCTAACETATE/ SUGAR C
8-TETRAHYDROQUINOXALINE/ 2,3,5,6-TETRAMETHYLPYRAZINE/ THYME OIL/ THYMOL/ TOLU BALSAM GUM, RESINOID A
CETIN/ 2-TRIDECANONE/ TRIETHYL CITRATE/ TRIGLYCERIDE(COCONUT OIL)/ 3,5,5-TRIMETHYL-1,2-CYCLOHEXANEDIONE/ 3,5
,6-TRIMETHYLCYCLOHEXA-1,3-DIENYL) BUT-2-EN-4-ONE/ 2,2,6-TRIMETHYLCYCLOHEXANONE/ 2,3,5-TRIMETHYLPYRAZINE/ c
DER/ gamma-VALEROLACTONE/ L-VALINE/ VANILLA BEAN EXTRACT AND OLEORESIN/ VANILLIN/ VERATRALDEHYDE/ VETIVE

OID AND ABSOLUTE/ BEET JUICE CONCENTRATE/ BENZALDEHYDE/ BENZALDEHYDE GLYCERYL ACETAL/ BENZOIC ACID/ BEN
NNAMATE/ BENZYL ISOBUTYL CARBINOL/ BERGAMOT OIL/ BORNYL ACETATE/ BROWN SUGAR/ BUCHU LEAF OIL/ 1,3-BUTANE
OL/ BUTYL BUTYRATE/ BUTYL BUTYRYL LACTATE/ n-BUTYL ISOVALERATE/ 3-BUTLYLIDENEPHTHALIDE/ BUTTER, BUTTER ES

or tobacco companies to their tobacco
SE TO OUR TOBACCO.

N-2-ONE/ 2,5-DIMETHYL-4-HYDROXY-3[2H]-FURANONE/ 3,7-DIMETHYL-1,3,6-OCTATRIENE/ 3,7-DIMETHYL-6-OCTENOIC ACID/
2,5-DIMETHYLPYRAZINE/ 2,6 DIMETHYLPYRAZINE/ DODECAHYDRO-3A,6,6,9A-TETRAMETHYLNAPHTHO[2,1-B]FURAN/
ETHYL BENZOATE/ ETHYL BUTYRATE/ ETHYL CINNAMATE/ ETHYL DECANOATE/ 2-ETHYL-3,5 (OR 6)-DIMETHYLPRYAZINE/ 4-E
YL-3-HYDROXY-4-METHYL-2(5H)-FURANONE/ ETHYL ISOVALERATE/ ETHYL LACTATE/ ETHYL LAURATE/ ETHYL LEVULINATE/ E
AZINE/ ETHYL MYRISTATE/ ETHYL NONANOATE/ ETHYL OCTADECANOATE/ ETHYL OCTANOATE/ ETHYL OLEATE/ ETHYL PALM
DEHYDE/ para-ETHYLPHENOL/ 3-ETHYLPYRIDINE/ EUCALYPTUS OIL/ FENCHONE (1,3,3-TRIMETHYL-BICYCLO[2.2.1]HEPTAN-2-
STARCH MODIFIED/ FRUCTOSE/ 4-(2-FURYL)-3-BUTEN-2-ONE/ GALBANUM OIL AND RESINOID/ GERANIOL/ GERANIUM ROSE
ID/ GLYCERIDES, MIXED DECANOYL AND OCTANOYL/ GLYCEROL/ GLYCYRRHIZIN, AMMONIATED/ GRAPHITE/ GUAIAC WOO
CETATE/ omega-6-HEXADECENLACTONE/ gamma-HEXALACTONE/ HEXANAL/ HEXANOIC ACID/ 3-HEXENOIC ACID/ HEXEN-2-
ENYLACETATE/ HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP/ HONEY/ 4-HYDROXY-2,5-DIMETHYL-3(2H)-FURANONE/ 3-HYDROXY-4,5-DIME
ara-HYDROXYPHENYL)-2-BUTANONE/ 2-HYDROXY-3,5,5-TRIMETHYL-2-CYCLOHEXENONE/ IMMORTELLE ABSOLUTE AND EXT
E/ ISOAMYL FORMATE/ ISOAMYL HEXANOATE/ ISOAMYL ISOVALERATE/ ISOAMYL PHENYLACETATE/ ISOBUTYL ACETATE/ ISOE
ALCOHOL/ ISOBUTYRALDEHYDE/ ISOBUTYRIC ACID/ ISOVALERIC ACID/ JASMINE ABSOLUTE/ KOLA NUT EXTRACT/ LABDANU
/ LICORICE ROOT, FLUID EXTRACT AND POWDER/ LIME OIL/ LINALOOL/ LINALOOL (3,7-DIMETHYL-1,6-OCTADIEN-3-OL)/ LINA
MALT EXTRACT/ MALTODEXTRIN/ MALTOL/ MANDARIN OIL/ MAPLE EXTRACT/ MAPLE SYRUP/ MATE LEAF, ABSOLUTE, EXT
ATE/ 2-METHOXY-4-METHYL-1-(1-METHYLETHYL)-BENZENE/ 2-METHOXY-4-METHYLPHENOL/ 2-METHOXY-3-(2-METHYLPRO
NOL/ 1-(para-METHOXYPHENYL)-1-PENTEN-3-ONE/ 1-(para-MENTHOXYPHENYL)-2-PROPANONE/ METHOXYPYRAZINE/ 2-METI
OIC ACID/ METHYL CINNAMATE/ METHYL DIHYDROJASMONATE/ METHYL 2-FUROATE/ 6-METHYL-3,5-HEPTADIEN-2-ONE/ 6-ME
MIXTURE/ 2-METHYL-5-(1-METHYLETHYL)-PHENOL/ METHYL-3-METHYLTHIOPROPIONATE/ METHYL 2-OCTYNOATE/ ME
METHYL SALICYLATE/ METHYL SULFIDE/ 4-METHYL-5-THIAZOLEETHANOL/ 4'-METHYLACETOPHENONE/ alpha-METHYLBE
CID/ METHYLCYCLOPENTENOLONE/ 2-(1-METHYLETHYL)-PHENOL/ 2-METHYLHEPTANOIC ACID/ 2-METHYLHEXANOIC AC
2-METHYLPYRAZINE/ 3-(METHYLTHIO)PROPIONALDEHYDE/ 5-METHYLQUINOXALINE/ 2-METHYLVALERIC ACID/ 3-METHYLVA
UNTAIN MAPLE SOLID EXTRACT/ MYRISTIC ACID/ MYRRH OIL AND ABSOLUTE/ NEROL/ NEROLI BIGRADE OIL/ NEROLIDO
SS ABSOLUTE/ 9,12-OCTADECADIENOIC ACID (48%) AND 9,12,15-OCTADECATRIENOIC ACID (58%) (MIXTURE)/ delta-OCTALAC
L/ OPOPONAX OIL/ ORANGE LEAF ABSOLUTE/ ORANGE OIL-SOUR/BITTER ORANGE OILS/ ORANGE OIL AND EXTRACT (S
ID ABSOLUTE/ PECTIN/ omega-PENTADECALACTONE/ 2,3-PENTANEDIONE/ 2-PENTANONE/ PEPPER OIL, BLACK/ PEPPERMI
YL ACETATE/ PHENETHYL ALCOHOL/ PHENETHYL BUTYRATE/ PHENETHYL CINNAMATE/ PHENETHYL ISOBUTYRATE/ PHENE
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DANCING DIVORCÉ

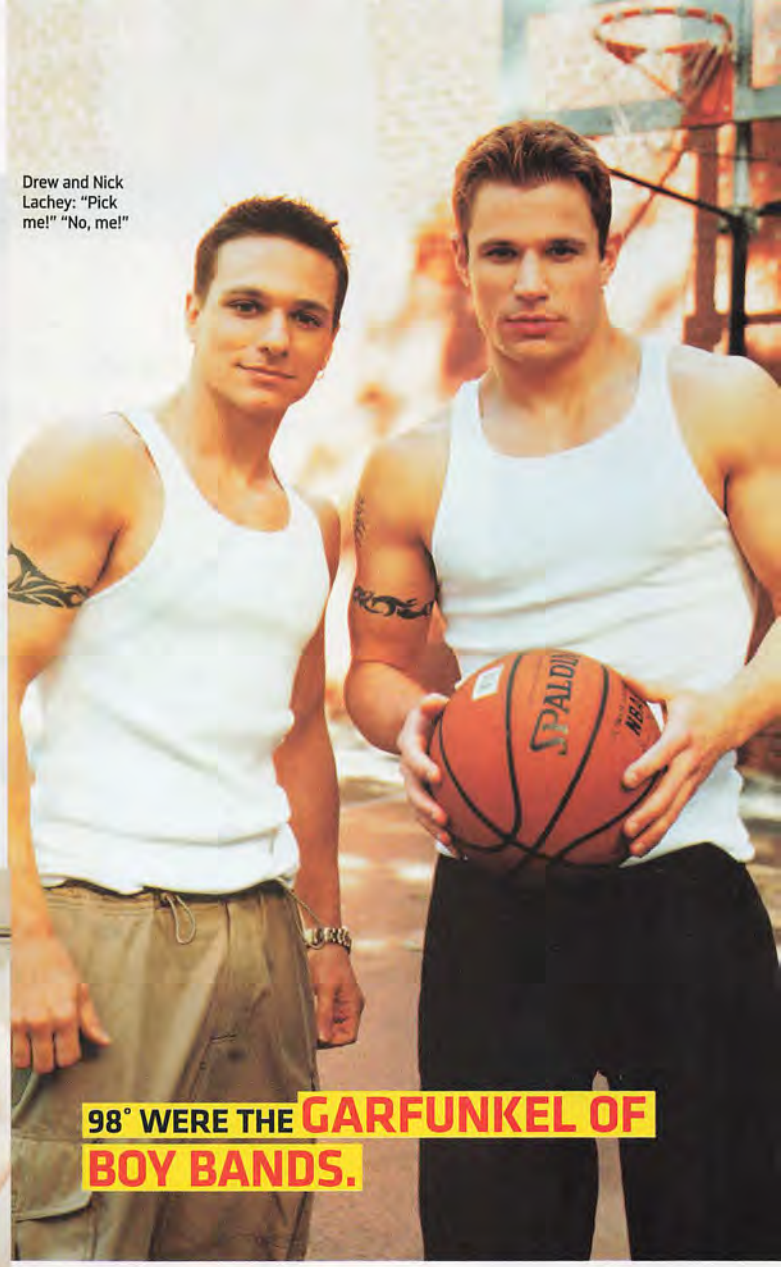
CRIS JUDD

BETTER KNOWN AS: The ex-Mr. Lo. Became a between-playa garnish when he married J. Lo after P. Diddy and before Ben. His ten months up, Judd sambaed with British Jen-alike Samantha Mumba for a minute-long romance, and then fell into the arms of vixen-in-development Rosario Dawson before she traded up to Colin Farrell — proving he had become the Flamingo Kid to the browned-goddess set.
ROCK BOTTOM: He may not have Miss Lo, but he was awarded King of the Jungle on "I'm a Celebrity, Get Me out of Here!"
DIDJA KNOW? Before working as a backup dancer for Michael Jackson on his *HIStory* tour, Judd worked his moves at Disney World's Pleasure Island.

NEWLYWED-IN-LAW

DREW LACHEY

BETTER KNOWN AS: The brother of that guy who's married to Ashlee Simpson's sister. Joined the Army, trained as a medic, drove an ambulance in New York City . . . then put those skills to absolutely no good use at all by joining his big brother Nick in 98˚, the Garfunkel of boy bands. Now singing and dancing on Broadway in *Rent*.
ROCK BOTTOM: Though Drew's last tenuous connection to his fleeting late-'90s fame comes in the form of occasional *Newlyweds* cameos, there are two other non-Lachey 98˚-ers in far worse professional shape.
DIDJA KNOW? Drew and Nick have matching armband tattoos! Says Drew: "Mine hurt more, 'cause it's bigger."



Drew and Nick Lachey: "Pick me!" "No, me!"

98˚ WERE THE GARFUNKEL OF BOY BANDS.

The White Stripes novelty shower curtain: Yours for $29.99.

A FACE FOR RADIO

SONNY BONO

BETTER KNOWN AS: Cher's straight man. A protégé of Phil Spector's, Bono was a talented songwriter. However, as a performer, his furry vests and huge mustache were no match for the glamour of partner Cher. His lone solo album, *Inner Views* (1967), remains an overlooked foray into psychedelia. His short-lived TV show, 1974's *The Sonny Comedy Review*, remains free of comedy.
ROCK BOTTOM: Appeared on *Fantasy Island*, angering Hervé Villechaize by calling him "Pontoon" rather than "Tattoo."
DIDJA KNOW? Successfully ran for mayor of Palm Springs in 1988 — because he was exasperated by the red tape involved in posting a sign outside his restaurant.

THE BLOCKHEAD

DONNIE WAHLBERG

BETTER KNOWN AS: Marky Mark's less-buff bro. Solidified his reputation as the "edgy" New Kid with his 1991 arrest for setting a Kentucky hotel hallway on fire. Nixed music career in favor of acting, often playing a dim-witted thug (*Ransom*, *Southie*). Lost 43 pounds to play Bruce Willis's killer in *The Sixth Sense*. His NBC series, *Boomtown*, was canceled after one season.
ROCK BOTTOM: Appearing in his brother's 1993 workout video.
DIDJA KNOW? Was a ring announcer at Wrestlemania X in 1994.

THE DETROIT DUCHESS

MEG WHITE

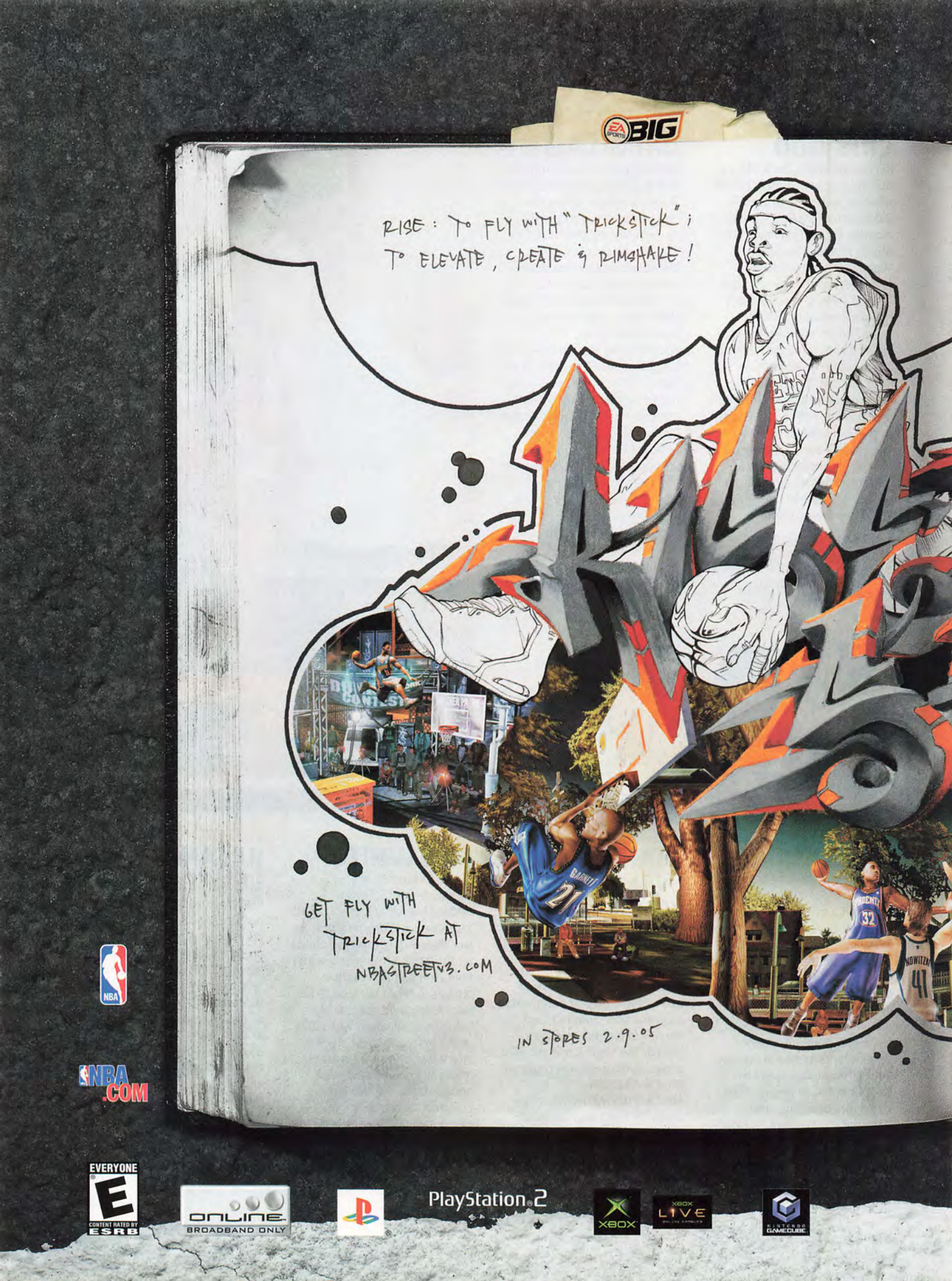
BETTER KNOWN AS: Jack's sister and/or ex-wife. Sullen ex-bartender and cook who married Jack White in 1996, and, despite lack of experience, played drums for the White Stripes for the first time after just two months' rehearsal. Tends to stand by her man: Aside from occasional behind-the-kit vocals, she rarely opens her mouth onstage or in interviews, unless there are cigarettes and bourbon around.
ROCK BOTTOM: Watching ex-husband Jack carouse with increasingly Meg-resembling girlfriend Renée Zellweger.
DIDJA KNOW? Loves Bob Seger.

THE BEATLE BUM

JULIAN LENNON

BETTER KNOWN AS: John's *other* marginally successful son. Made his musical debut at 11 years old on John's *Walls and Bridges* album. Spent much of the early '80s as a boozy tabloid spectacle. Released *Valotte* and its hit single, "Too Late for Goodbyes," in 1984; barely released follow-up efforts tanked.
ROCK BOTTOM: On the twentieth anniversary of his father's murder, released a bitter statement in which he dubbed Yoko Ono a "black hole."
DIDJA KNOW? Appeared as a bartender in *Leaving Las Vegas*.

From left: Lego/Corbis Outline; George Lange/Corbis Outline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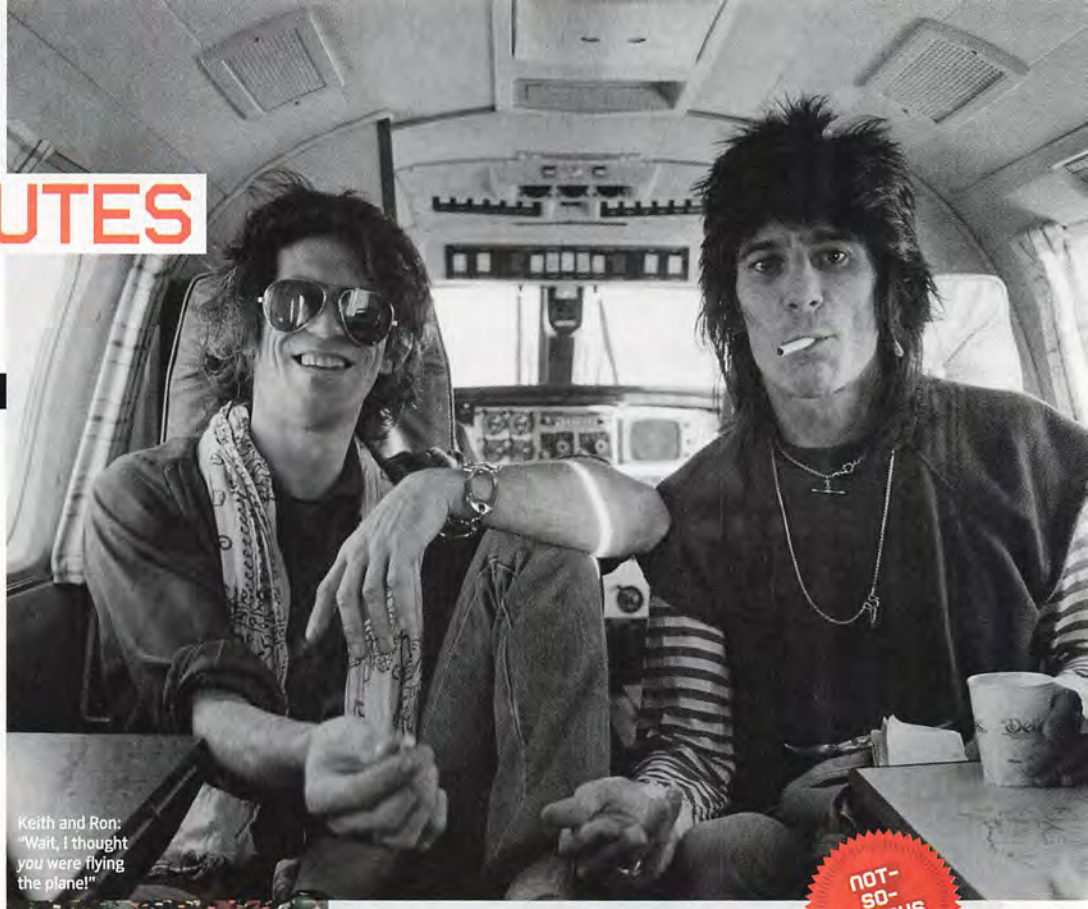
SUBSTITUTES

WHEN YOUR SINGER OD'S OR YOUR GUITARIST DROWNS IN HIS OWN POOL, WHO YOU GONNA CALL?



Keith and Ron: "Wait, I thought *you* were flying the plane!"

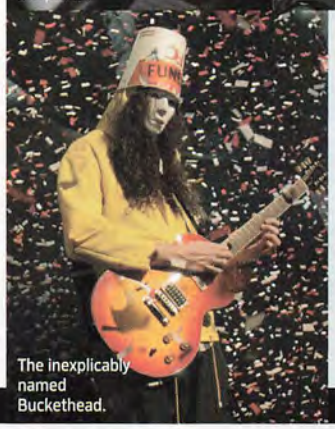
B-LIST BLUES BROS.

JOHN GOODMAN, JIM BELUSHI

BETTER KNOWN AS: Sitcom funny-men turned Blues Brothers singers. In 1994 Dan Aykroyd recruited the two girthsome comedians to replace deceased Blues Brother, and Jim's actual sibling, John Belushi for some charity-assisting shows. All three subsequently performed at the 1997 Super Bowl, while Aykroyd and Goodman also appeared in 1998's dismal movie sequel, *Blues Brothers 2000*.

ROCK BOTTOM: Commenting on Jim Belushi's absence from *Blues Brothers 2000*, director John Landis described it as "not a disaster."

DIDJA KNOW? Both Aykroyd and Goodman agreed to work on the movie without a salary, regarding it as a "labor of love."



The inexplicably named Buckethead.

NOT-SO-FAMOUS FACE

ROLLING STONES "NEWBIE"

RON WOOD

BETTER KNOWN AS: Keith Richards's six-string and eightball sparring partner. Rock's greatest guitar-player-for-hire served time with the Faces before officially joining the Stones in 1975. But he remained on a wage, not a profit percentage, until 1993 — enduring spells of poverty little helped by his fondness for heroin and cocaine.

ROCK BOTTOM: When in 1997 Wood told an interviewer that he was "working all the time with Keith," Richards responded, "You do shit-all. *I'm* working all the time. You do fucking nil, asshole."

DIDJA KNOW? Once had a licensing deal with Guinness, which stocked the personal pub on his farm in Ireland.

PAIL FACE

BUCKETHEAD

BETTER KNOWN AS: KFC-friendly Guns N' Roses guitarist. In any band other than GN'R, Buckethead would have looked ridiculous. Next to the startling, polished face and *Predator* dreadlocks of beefy singer Axl Rose, however, the enigmatic top-string torturer seemed rather ordinary.

ROCK BOTTOM: Frustrated with the band's poor productivity, Bucket quit the Gunners in 2004. He was labeled "inconsistent and erratic" — by *Axl Rose*.

DIDJA KNOW? Though Buckethead claims to have been raised in a chicken coop, he really grew up in Southern California. His real name is Brian.

WHERE'S DAVE?

SAMMY HAGAR, GARY CHERONE

BETTER KNOWN AS: Van Halen's less-good vocalists.

ROCK BOTTOM: In 2002, Hagar joined forces with Roth for a "Sans Halen" tour. When Cherone lost his voice during a '98 VH show, his brother said the crowd was grumbling, "Bring back Dave! Cherone sucks!" Cherone asked his brother how he reacted. "Oh, I joined in."

DIDJA KNOW? Hagar's primary source of income is now his multimillion-dollar Cabo Wabo tequila brand. Cherone has played both the title role and Judas in a Boston production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Sammy Hagar learns not to make fun of Mike Tyson's lisp.

HAGAR'S PRIMARY INCOME IS NOW FROM TEQUILA.

From top: Henry Diltz/Corbis; Frank Micelotta/Getty Images; E.J. Camp/Corbis Outline

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BITTER EXES

"YOU GUYS ARE GOING NOWHERE WITHOUT ME . . . HEY! WAIT! COME BACK!"

Destiny's Child in 1999 (left to right): Roberson, Rowland, Luckett, Knowles.

BACKSTREET BOMB

SAM LICATA, A.K.A. PHOENIX STONE

BETTER KNOWN AS: Backstreet Boy who quit right before they got megafamous. Although one of the original members, Licata was already growing too big for his baggy britches in 1993. After the Boys recorded his song "Save the World," Licata demanded to keep it for himself, then left the band to pursue solo career glory.
ROCK BOTTOM: In a 2000 interview, Sam — releasing his solo debut under the name Phoenix Stone — boasted that he had been approached to record with none other than . . . Art Garfunkel. He has not been heard from since.
DIDJA KNOW? Phoenix wasn't the only forgotten Backstreeter. Charlie Edwards was booted in 1993 for having a voice that svengali Lou Pearlman diplomatically described as not "recording-right for the sound we needed."

Ryan Seacrest beats Brian Dunkleman at musical chairs.

DUMPED DIVAS

DESTINY'S ORPHANS

LETOYA LUCKETT, LATAVIA ROBERSON, FARRAH FRANKLIN

BETTER KNOWN AS: The ones who aren't the ones who aren't Beyoncé. Destiny's Child Rule No. 1: Do not cross Mathew Knowles. Roberson and Luckett did in 1999, claiming their manager was hoarding profits and favoring daughter Beyoncé and Kelly Rowland. They learned they'd been axed when Michelle Williams and Franklin (who split from the group five months later) appeared in the "Say My Name" video instead. Ouch.
ROCK BOTTOM: The ex-Children sued over "Survivor" dis lyrics.
DIDJA KNOW? Roberson and Luckett tried to start a group called Anjel, while Franklin tried to go solo. Emphasis on *tried*.

UNLUCKIEST MAN IN ROCK

PETE BEST

BETTER KNOWN AS: Original Beatles drummer. Played band's early stints in German clubs where, with Paul McCartney, he was forced to sleep in a windowless "dungeon" next to a cinema urinal. Also doubled as band manager, getting gigs and increasing their fan base. Replaced on stool by supposed good buddy Ringo Starr.
ROCK BOTTOM: After his post-sacking musical endeavors failed, he tried to gas himself to death.
DIDJA KNOW? While the Beatles were busy becoming the most famous band in the world, Best was busy working in a 24-hour bakery.

DUNKLEMAN OUT

BRIAN DUNKLEMAN

BETTER KNOWN AS: The man who made even Ryan Seacrest seem cool. Did some stand-up in Nevada. Co-hosted *American Idol* the first season, then opted out to pursue a little American idolatry of his own in the form of — wait for it — a stand-up career. Or was forced out by spotlight-hogging Seacrest. Or axed by Fox for being totally embarrassing. Depends who you ask.
ROCK BOTTOM: Shot an ill-conceived pilot for VH1 called *Gaydar*, in which celebrities would guess whether or not a contestant was gay. He was the host, not a contestant. And not a celebrity.
DIDJA KNOW? Brian Dunkleman is his real name!

ALT-COUNTRY ALTERNATE

JAY FARRAR

BETTER KNOWN AS: Jeff Tweedy's bandmate in country-rockers Uncle Tupelo. Tweedy would later say that he was "in awe" of high school pal Farrar. But, following the group's demise in 1994, it was Tweedy's Wilco, rather than Farrar's Son Volt, that would go on to stadium-filling glory.
ROCK BOTTOM: Last June's Wilco CD *A Ghost Is Born* was a hit that inspired acres of press. Farrar's simultaneously released solo live album, *Stone, Steel & Bright Lights*, wasn't. And didn't.
DIDJA KNOW? Farrar recently said he and Tweedy no longer speak: "As you grow older, you don't keep in contact with the people you went to high school with."

STILL BITTER AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

DAVE MUSTAINE

BETTER KNOWN AS: Metallica outcast turned Megadeth frontman. In 1983, malcontent guitarist Mustaine was booted from what would become the most popular metal band of all time for being an even bigger drunk than the other members, and formed his second-tier speed-metal outfit — RC Cola to Metallica's Coke.
ROCK BOTTOM: In 2004's documentary *Some Kind of Monster*, Mustaine cathartically whines to Lars Ulrich that getting kicked out of Metallica ruined his life.
DIDJA KNOW? No fewer than 15 people have played in Megadeth over the past 20 years.

From top: George Lange/Corbis Outline; Courtesy of Fox

THE POOR MAN'S...

LIKE FAMOUS PEOPLE, ONLY CHEAPER

Paris and Nicole enjoy drinks, being richer than you.

PARIS HILTON'S ETHEL MERTZ

NICOLE RICHIE

BETTER KNOWN AS: The shorter, rounder, smarter one on *The Simple Life*. Lionel Richie's adopted daughter flips the bird to motorists, makes out with strangers and proposes a "three-way" between herself, Paris and the son of their hosts — while Paris sits beside her and says nothing. Following in her best friend's footsteps, Richie tried to create her own national exposure at a Joey and T fashion show by flashing her breasts to show her new nipple piercing. "I've gone through so much in my life that pulling my top up doesn't seem like a big deal," she later explained.

ROCK BOTTOM: Being arrested in Malibu in February 2003 — charged with possession of heroin and driving with a suspended license.

DIDJA KNOW? Her godfather is Michael Jackson.

THE BARGAIN-BASEMENT ROBERT PLANT

DAVID COVERDALE

BETTER KNOWN AS: Whitesnake's chief lemon-squeezer. While all '80s metal owed some debt of thanks to Led Zeppelin, Whitesnake mainman Coverdale just copied the singing style, haughty mannerisms and hair-style of Robert Plant. He even did an album with Jimmy Page in 1993. "Well, the guitar was good on it," said Page later.

ROCK BOTTOM: The 38-year-old Coverdale's unappetizing canoodling with soon-to-be ex-wife Tawny Kitaen — his junior by a decade — in the video for 1987's "Here I Go Again."

DIDJA KNOW? Plant's nickname for Dave is "David Coverversion."

THE CUDDLIER SUGE KNIGHT

IRVING "IRV GOTTI" LORENZO

BETTER KNOWN AS: Murder Inc. head honcho. Commendably, he helped sign Jay-Z in the '90s. But his next discoveries are less unimpeachable: Ashanti (Avis to Beyoncé's Hertz) and "sensitive thug" Ja Rule — himself a poor man's DMX and Tupac in one.

ROCK BOTTOM: A public beef with Eminem and 50 Cent left Gotti's street cred in shambles, and pretty much nuked Rule's career.

DIDJA KNOW? In 2003, Gotti's brother and employee Christopher claimed an assailant had shot him in the leg — forensics experts suspect he accidentally shot himself.

THE 21ST-CENTURY BARRY MANILOW

CLAY AIKEN

BETTER KNOWN AS: America's harmless chorus boy. His vague professions of love have allowed him to hawk his albums, shirts and calendars to teen girls who don't yet know how frustrated they'll be by falling for guys like him. But without the big piano hands and songwriting skills, he lacks the stature of Manilow in his big-haired '70s glory — and remains that lovable but boring musical theater sissy you shared lockers with in high school.

ROCK BOTTOM: Playing the Apple Seller in a 1997 production of *Oklahoma!*

DIDJA KNOW? Clay has a mortal fear of trees, and will not be photographed near them.

LIKE CLAY AIKEN, ONLY ROUNDER. AND LESS SUCCESSFUL

RUBEN STUDDARD

BETTER KNOWN AS: The 360-lb. "velvet teddy bear" who quit his Alabama customer-service job and got more than 12 million people to vote him 2003's American Idol. But soccer-mom-friendly runner-up Aiken — beaten by less than 1% — won more applause, then outsold Studdard's debut by nearly a million copies.

ROCK BOTTOM: After a stint touring smaller venues than Aiken, was reduced to signing autographs at a Philadelphia Big-and-Tall store by spring 2004.

DIDJA KNOW? His rider demands a "large bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken."

Courtesy of Fox

Dear Superstar

YOU SEND QUESTIONS, WE GET ANSWERS. WHO LOVES YA, BABY?

MICHAEL Stipe

THE R.E.M. SINGER THOUGHT YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS SEX LIFE, DRINKING HABITS AND FRIENDSHIP WITH COURTNEY LOVE WERE "SNARKY." BUT IN A GOOD WAY!

BY DAVID KEEPS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHERYL NIELDS

"I'M TIRED OF being this solemn poet of the masses, the enigma shrouded in a mystery," says Michael Stipe between slurps of a double macchiato decaf at L.A.'s Chateau Marmont.

Indeed, while he looks, as always, like a slightly grumpy monk, he is more than capable of laughing at himself, despite being tired from touring in support of R.E.M.'s new album, *Around the Sun*. When *Blender* remarks that his blue onstage makeup makes him look like something from *Blade Runner*, the 45-year-old puckishly counters, "It's more like *The Incredibles* on a bad jag. But I was there first!"

Even so, it is with some trepidation that *Blender* draws his attention to the inclusion of "Shiny Happy People" in our 2004 "Worst Songs of All Time" list.

"I'm deeply honored" he replies. "It was an exercise in bubblegum. It's not a terrible song; it's just irritating to some degree."

And so, moving on to the answering-your-questions part of the day. Stipe seems to know what to expect: "You want clever answers to snarky questions that are going to make fun of me."

R.E.M. in 1984. Left to right: Mike Mills, Peter Buck, Bill Berry, and Michael Stipe.

WHAT DID YOU LOSE WHEN YOU LOST BILL BERRY?

MURMURRRR, RICKREALL, OR

Well that's a nice start. Momentum, the ability to take for granted the slippery idea of chemistry, which was just shattered when he left. A sense of security about our mission or goal. And, of course, a great drummer. He's still a great friend and now a farmer. I don't know many farmers, but Bill is one of them.

IF YOU HADN'T SHAVED OFF ALL YOUR HAIR, WHAT KIND OF 'DO WOULD YOU BE SPORTING?

BOSCHREP, TEMPE, AZ

I probably would have a really long beard, and that long bad hair that people have. I'd like to have a mullet, but I'm not sure I'm capable. My worst hair day lasted a year, 1989. It was a combination of every bad haircut from the '80s all rolled into one, kind of a fauxhawk and a rattail going down the back. It was beyond tragic. I'm just shocked that no one sat me down and said, "What the fuck are you thinking?"

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU LOST YOUR TEMPER?

JAYCEE812, EAST DENNIS, MA

I'm a terrible sulker, being from the South, where we have perfected passive aggression with generations of practice. But two days ago, I was trying to rectify a wrong and I got my words twisted and I got really, really pissed about it and just wound up shouting.

WHO DOES THE BEST MICHAEL STIPE IMPERSONATION?

LACHEY, KEVIL, KY

My friend Aaron. He's a drummer. He mumbles a lot and there are long pauses in the middle of every sentence, which is me in real life.

SAY SOMETHING NICE ABOUT GEORGE W. BUSH.

NUDELT04, HYDE PARK, VT

Not publicly. I can't do that.

WHAT PRACTICAL ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE THE NEWLY FAMOUS?

TEEBONEARK, NORTHAMPTON, MA

Never eat broccoli when there are cameras around. →

Styling by Alyssa Leal for Artists by Timothy Priano; Grooming by Roz Music for Magnet L.A.; Photo of R.E.M.: Ron Wolfson/LFI

"I'M TIRED OF BEING THE ENIGMA SHROUDED IN MYSTERY."

GINGHAM VEST AND PANTS, POLO SHIRT AND UNDERSHIRT ALL FROM MAXFIELD'S, L.A. SNEAKERS BY PUMA

Above: We're guessing "post-acid" Beatles.

Stipe earns extra cash as a Peter Frampton look-alike.

AS A BIG HOLLYWOOD CHEESE, HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED EXPLORING SCIENTOLOGY OR THE KABBALAH?
G8RGAL, JACKSONVILLE, FL

I was invited to Kabbalah but I was having dinner with friends instead at an Indian restaurant, so I didn't go. As for Scientology, I've never even considered it.

YOU MUST HAVE GOTTEN SOME INTERESTING FILM ROLE OFFERS IN YOUR TIME. WHAT WAS THE MOST LUDICROUS?
AREEEM, ATHENS, GA

Playing the gay neighbor opposite Jack Nicholson in *As Good As It Gets*. I read the first 10 pages and I said, "This is shit."

WHAT IS YOUR WORST MEMORY FROM HIGH SCHOOL?
SANTANA62, JACKPOT, NV

Grades 9 through 12.

WHAT ARE YOU TERRIBLE AT?
DEMETRISACK, ALTOONA, WI

I'm terrible at basketball. I actually played football when I was a kid, and I was good, I was a linebacker, which didn't make any sense because everyone else was three times bigger than me. I was always the runt kid. But I got pummeled with the best of 'em, and I backed my line.

"WHEN I GET REALLY HAMMERED I TAKE MY CLOTHES OFF."

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU REALIZED YOU WERE GAY?
TRESJOLIE80, AMPERE, NJ

I was first attracted to men actively when I was 13. I kind of had my first sexual awakening much earlier, with a brother/sister team with red hair in a bathtub on Easter Sunday. It was fairly innocent, but it was really fun and I never looked back. I still have a thing for redheads and freckles.

WHAT ARE THE BEST AND WORST THINGS ABOUT BEING COURTNEY LOVE'S FRIEND?
MATTX8656, PHELPS, NY

She's mercurial, and one of the most solid people I've ever met. There's none of the bullshit in the middle and she is as smart as Peter Buck. That's the best and the worst.

WHAT IS THE COOLEST THING YOU OWN?
XDANIELLAX, KODAK, TN

My iPod that was programmed by Peter Buck. It has 7,000 songs hand-picked for me by him.

WHO DID YOU HAVE POSTERS OF ON YOUR WALL AS A TEENAGER?
DEBDUB, BASIN CITY, WA

Patti Smith, Talking Heads. Most of the posters that I had weren't of people. It was like a psychedelic spiral that said LOVE in the middle of it.

PETER BUCK ONCE SAID THAT YOU'D NEVER PLAYED A BEATLES RECORD. HAVE YOU SINCE?
GABEL, CHICAGO

Not from beginning to end. I famously said that the Beatles were elevator music. That was taken out of context, or I was just being my own indecipherable self at age 27. And I had to explain at some point to Sean and Yoko that what I meant to say was, growing up, the Beatles were the music that was played everywhere. The music that meant a lot to me when I was 7, 8, 9 years old was the Monkees and the Banana Splits and H.R. Pufnstuf. And then country music, 'cause I lived in Texas.

HOW DO YOU MAKE PEACE WITH THE FACT THAT YOUR RECORDS DON'T SELL LIKE THEY USED TO?
SARANLM, WILTON, CT

We're not a radio band. We had fluke hits and people bought a lot of records then. People don't buy records the way they used to. And that's pretty much across the board, not just R.E.M. So it doesn't really hurt my feelings that much.

WHAT IS THE CLOSEST YOU'VE COME TO DYING?
KENNEDY18, OROFINO, ID

I was trapped on a mountain in a freak hailstorm that turned to snow and a lightning storm and I was knocked out and I almost froze to death.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION ABOUT MICHAEL STIPE?
KARPETS, ELYSBURG, PA

That I'm tall.

WHAT KIND OF DRUNK ARE YOU?
BUGRAD99, BOSTON

Amiable. I just laugh and laugh and laugh. When I get really hammered I take my clothes off. That's a sure sign. It's been a long time since the last time I did that. Probably a year.

IN THE SONG "PILGRIMAGE," YOU REFER TO A TWO-HEADED COW. I SAW ONE IN FRANCE SOME YEARS AGO. HAVE YOU ACTUALLY SEEN ONE?
PRTYGRRL, MIAMI

That's a calf, not a cow, in the lyric. And yes, I have seen a two-headed calf, in *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* →

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Beatles: LFI; Stipe (top): Classmates.com; Stipe (bottom): Sheryl Nields

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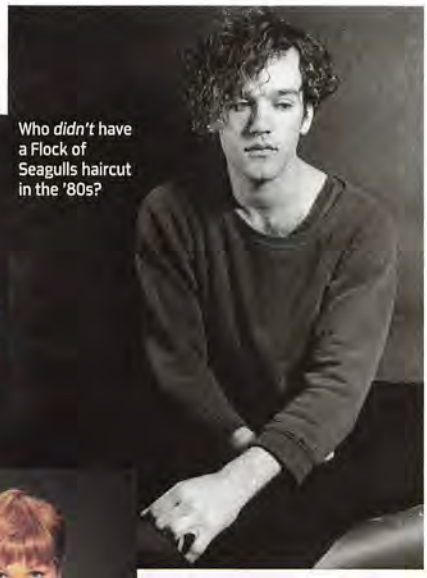
In 1999: "Here! I'm over *here*!"



Who *didn't* have a Flock of Seagulls haircut in the '80s?

Right: Shirley MacLaine is extremely unimpressed.

WHAT DO YOU DREAM ABOUT?
DENISE PALM, VERGAS, MN

The future. It's never scary, but it's always postapocalyptic. Everything has been blown up and put back together again.

MY FRIEND SAYS HE CAN'T GET A PERMIT TO OPEN A SPORTS BAR IN DOWNTOWN ATHENS [GEORGIA], BECAUSE R.E.M. CONTROLS THE CITY COUNCIL. TRUE?
JESSE9227, CHARLOTTE, NC

That is so not true. There are politicians that we have supported because they had the right idea for a town that is growing as quickly as Athens. There are a lot of sports bars downtown, and I'm surprised there hasn't been a moratorium. But we don't control the city council; that is ludicrous.

I'M GOING TO ATHENS NEXT YEAR. WHAT'S GOOD TO EAT AT YOUR RESTAURANT GRIT?
PANAMAPAM, KANSAS CITY, MO

It's not my restaurant. I own the building that the restaurant leases. It sounds boring, but you should order the tofu on top of brown rice with lots of cheese.

DO YOU KNOW WHEN AND WHERE YOU WERE CONCEIVED?
ELLIOTT47, ALPHARETTA, GA

Yes and no. That's not for public consumption; that is between me and my mother and father.

WHEN DID YOU LEARN ABOUT THE FACTS OF LIFE?
BKGRL82, IRONTON, OH

You mean sex and fucking? There was one time in the schoolyard and one time on a Cub Scout camping trip.

EVER FALLEN IN LOVE WITH SOMEONE YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE WITH?
ADAM0204, MAHASKA, KS

The closest would be a series of very intense crushes.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU HAD A CRY ON YOUR PILLOW?
DISTIPEAL, LARGO, FL

I don't cry in my pillow. On planes I always cry. Something about altitude, the lack of oxygen and the bad movies. I cried over a St. Bernard movie once on a plane. That was really embarrassing. Of course the flight attendant came over: "Would you like some more ice?" And I'm like: [sobbing] "No, I'm fine!"

WHAT INJUSTICE REALLY GRINDS YOUR GEARS?
DIFATTA, NEW YORK

I'm quoting [artist] Ryan McGinness: "Where is my jet pack? I thought we'd be a little more advanced by now."

"I WANT TO PLAY A CORPSE ON *SIX FEET UNDER*."

WHAT IS YOUR MOST IRRATIONAL FEAR?
UMGNASH, KULPSVILLE, PA

Swimming in lakes. Swimming in the ocean too. We made part of the record in Miami, and I would go down to the beach, and not 20 feet from the water I see a fish that is at least seven feet long swimming close to the shore. I did not go back in the ocean the entire month. I was terrified. I called the coast guard. I went online. I was obsessed. I lost two days in the studio over that stupid fish.

With Courtney Love in 2000.

Stipe's new contact lenses proved very uncomfortable.

DO YOU BELIEVE THERE ARE "OTHERS"?
STEVE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

That we are not alone in this universe? Come on — are you kidding? How egotistical are we to think that we would be the only possible species that has made it to this level of intelligence?

WHAT DO YOU GET ALL OCD ABOUT?
JENNABOYZ, LUNENBERG, MA

Smell. I have a really keen sniffer. If I'm walking down the street I can smell everything that has happened there. So it's sometimes difficult to be certain places. I was onstage in the middle of a song the other night, and I smelled a skunk. I was like, where the fuck did that come from? It wasn't me. And it wasn't the song.

WHEN YOU GET THE MUNCHIES, WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT?
THEONEBEHINDTHESCENE, YAKIMA, WA

I haven't smoked pot in a long time. But when I'm really hungry, I want nachos.

WHAT TV SHOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO A GUEST SPOT ON?
MISTYBLUE, HARTFORD

They always want me to play myself and that's a big snooze. I really wanted to be on *Six Feet Under* as a corpse. That would be hysterical.

HOW LONG DO YOU WAIT AFTER A DATE UNTIL YOU CALL?
PLAYASGAME, VARYSBURG, NY

I text right away.

NAME SOMEONE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO MEET AND THEN WISHED YOU HADN'T.
WOOOOHU, CHAMPAGNE, IL

Shirley MacLaine. I told her about a dream I had with her in it, and I thought she'd get a laugh out of it. She called security. I apologized and backed away. I'm a huge fan of her work as an actor — I was heartbroken.

IF YOU HAD CHILDREN, WHAT WOULD YOU NAME THEM?
LASTCALL2, EVANSTON, IL

I always thought Pepsi was a great name. You don't have to have a surname if your name is Pepsi. It's not like anybody would ever forget.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE PUT ON YOUR HEADSTONE?
FRANKSPLACE, RALEIGH, NC

"I told you I was sick." My sister photographed that actual headstone, in Key West, I believe.

TELL ME A BAD HABIT THAT YOU'VE GIVEN UP.
LICKY33, PORTER, IN

Interviews as therapy. [BLENDER]

Top, clockwise from top left: Brian Rasic/Rex USA; Laura Levine; The Kobal Collection; Bottom, left to right: Steve Granitz/Wireimage.com; Sheryl Nields

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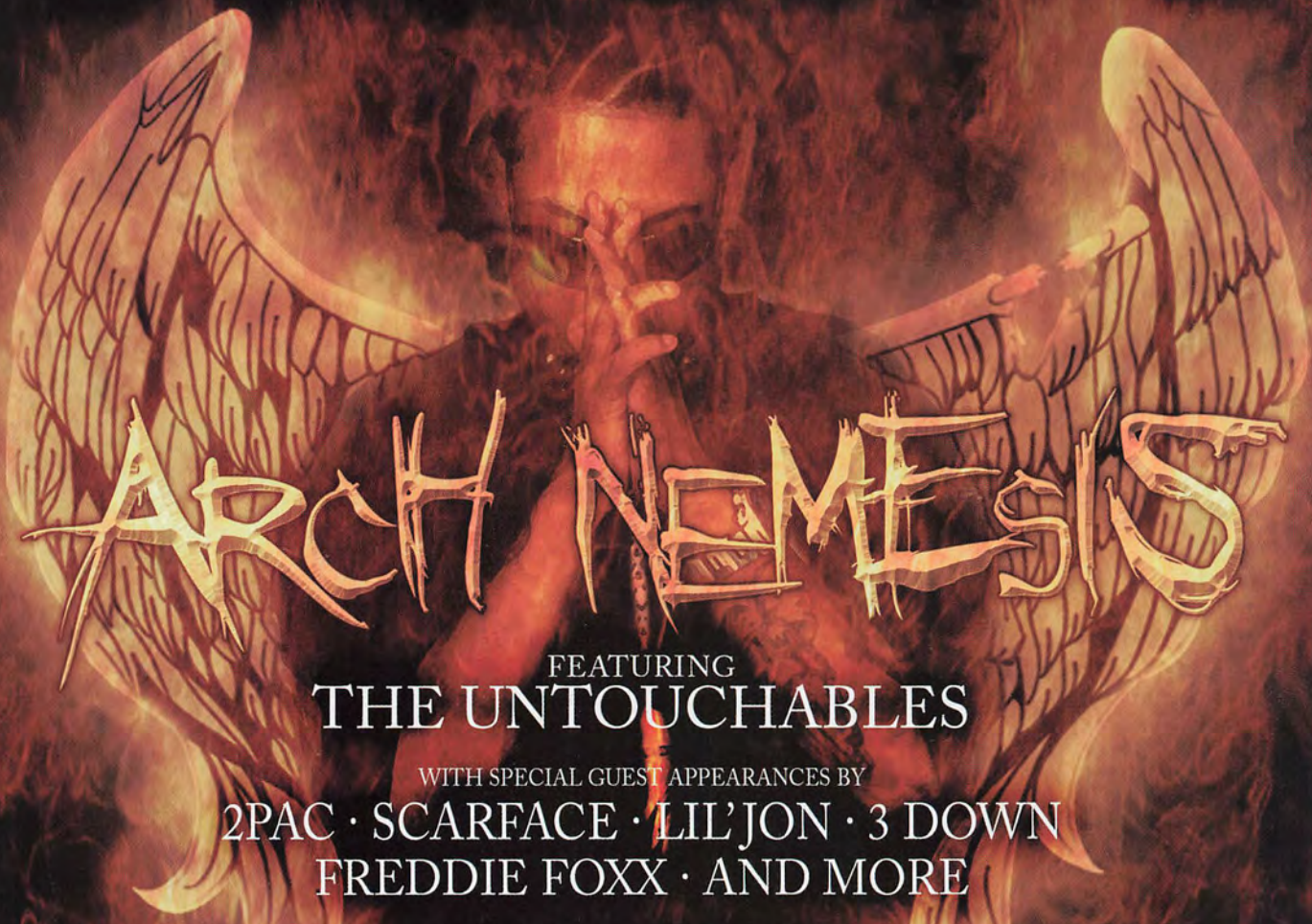

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Sting: "I said, don't stand so close to me!"

THIS MONTH, THE HEARTWARMING TALE OF HOW SOME PARISIAN HOOKERS HELPED LAUNCH THE CAREER OF ONE OF THE BIGGEST BANDS OF THE '80S

BY JOHNNY BLACK

THE POLICE

Roxanne

25 YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 1979 THIS MONTH

BACK ON OCTOBER 20, 1977, Sting, the beloved Tantric sex god, savior of the rainforest and Commander of the British Empire, was merely another singer in another Brit punk band. Except he was older than most.

At the nearly elderly age of 26, he knew that if his trio, the Police, didn't make it soon, he wouldn't have many other chances for stardom. The Police were playing that night in the Nashville Club, an unassuming little Paris venue, and, to pass the time until the show, Sting took a stroll through the city's notorious red-light district.

Fascinated by the sight of prostitutes openly plying their trade, he began to ➜

"I WOUND UP PLAYING THIS INCREDIBLE CHORD WITH MY ARSE." STING

Neal Preston/Corbis

The Police, circa 1980: From left, Andy Summers, Sting and Stewart Copeland

imagine what it might be like to fall in love with one of these lipsticked ladies of the street. By the time he walked back to the band's fleabag hotel, the notion was turning into a song. Police guitarist Andy Summers recalled that Sting played him some ideas for the track before they'd even left Paris.

The band's independently released debut single, "Fall Out," had been an unmitigated disaster, so when they went into producer Nigel Gray's Surrey Sound Studios in Leatherhead just outside London, on January 13, 1978, they were suffering an acute case of career anxiety.

Surrey Sound had been chosen largely for its rock-bottom rates of £10 (about $19) an hour, but with the Police still on the breadline, even this minimal cost was financed by drummer Stewart Copeland's opinionated music entrepreneur brother, Miles Copeland, who expected to see a return on his money.

Among the tracks they recorded was the song had Sting started in Paris, now named "Roxanne" after the gorgeous fantasy heroine in Edmond Rostand's 1897 novel, *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

"I was just about to sing the first line," remembers Sting, "when I noticed a stand-up piano. I was tired, I'd been up all night, so I just sat down. I thought the piano lid was closed, but it was open, so I wound up playing this incredible chord with my arse. It was this sort of atonal cluster that went nicely against the chords we were playing. We thought it was funny, so we left it in."

As Nigel Gray recalls, despite that lucky start, getting the song just right took some doing. "Because there are several long gaps, it was difficult to get everybody to come back in on the beat. I finally did it by standing on the loudspeaker cabinet so they could all see me, and conducting them."

When the song was done, Sting regarded "Roxanne" as little more than a throwaway, because "the song was such an anachronism. Compared with our usual material it was slow, quiet and melodic." He still felt that way on March 21, when Miles Copeland turned up at Surrey Sound to see how his investment was shaping up.

"They were all very depressed at the end of the session because I had ripped apart just about every number they'd done," remembers Copeland. "I asked them if they had anything else and they said, 'Well, there's one more song but we're not going to play it to you,' as they figured I wouldn't like it. That song turned out to be 'Roxanne' and I immediately thought it was fantastic."

The next day, Copeland took the track to A&M Records and secured a deal to have it released. Being a shrewd operator, he knew that a virtually unknown band wouldn't attract a large advance, so he didn't even ask for one. "I said, 'No advance, no upfront money, nothing — just give me the highest royalty you can possibly pay and let's go do it.'"

"Roxanne" was released in the U.S. and U.K. in April, but despite nearly universal good reviews and Mick Jagger's declaring it his favorite single at the time, it flopped, largely because Radio One, the U.K.'s national radio station, considered the lyrics too vulgar for airplay.

When A&M re-released it in the U.S. in February 1979, there was little promotion, and the band was even advised not to tour the U.S. because it wouldn't be worthwhile. Defying such warnings, the headstrong Police went ahead. They traveled by station wagon, and all three band members shared one motel room.

"When we first came to America," Sting says, "nobody knew who the fuck we were. I mean nobody. Nobody gave a fuck about ["Roxanne"]. Nobody played it."

Six gigs into the tour, when the Police pulled into Austin, Texas, on March 7, everything started to turn around. A local DJ took a liking to "Roxanne" and started playing it. "They played it on the radio station and people phoned up and said they liked it," recalls Sting. "The station next door picked it up and the town next to that picked it up. And we found ourselves with a hit."

"Roxanne" entered the *Billboard* Top 40 on April 7, spent 13 weeks on the charts and, though it peaked at a humble 32, launched one of the biggest bands of the '80s and soon achieved classic status.

Notable cover versions have come from George Michael, King's X and Incubus, whose guitarist, Mike Einzinger, points out that "Roxanne" played a part in the creation of their 1999 song "Stellar." "When I wrote the guitar parts I wasn't really thinking of what was going to go on underneath it as far as the rhythm section," he explains. "Our drummer, Josi, and Dirk, our bass player, came up with this "Roxanne"-type thing and it just fit."

"Roxanne" was memorably performed by Eddie Murphy in his 1982 smash comedy *48 Hours* and reinterpreted by Ewan McGregor in 2001's *Moulin Rouge*. And can anybody seriously doubt that the 1987 Steve Martin–Daryl Hannah movie, a modern re-telling of the Cyrano DeBergerac story, would have been called *Roxanne* if the song hadn't become so well-loved?

It's only fitting then, that 19 years after the Police's bitter breakup, "Roxanne" would kick off their brief reunion performance at the 2003 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction. [BLENDER]

VITAL STATISTICS

SONG "Roxanne"
BAND The Police
LABEL A&M
PRODUCER Nigel Gray
PERFORMERS
Sting *vocals, bass*
Andy Summers *guitar*
Stewart Copeland *drums*
CHART DEBUT
February 1979
HIGHEST CHART POSITION 32
WEEKS ON CHART 13

WHO'S WHO

STING 53
Former primary schoolteacher turned bleached-blond punk bassist/singer turned eco-warrior megastar.

NIGEL GRAY 57
U.K. producer who later became a doctor. Lost his medical license after being found guilty of overprescribing drugs.

MILES COPELAND 60
Maverick rock impresario for the Police, R.E.M., the Bangles and the Go-Go's; currently hosts legendary biannual songwriting conferences in his 14th-century French castle.

The Police: Richard Young/RexUSA; Cover art: Mr. Snuggles; Sting: Richard Young/RexUSA

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"JAY-Z STOLE ANNIE"

CHLOË SEVIGNY, STAR OF WOODY ALLEN'S UPCOMING *MELINDA AND MELINDA*, REVEALS WHY IT'S A GOOD THING HER DRUM KIT WAS LOST IN A FIRE, WHICH POP STAR SHE'S STALKING AND WHAT'S BEHIND HER BEEF WITH JAY-Z

BY LAUREN SANDLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GUY AROCH

Melinda and Melinda opens March 18.

THE ALBUM THAT
SET ME APART IN HIGH SCHOOL

THE SMITHS
THE SMITHS
SIRE, 1984

"In high school I idolized this girl who went out with my brother. She was the most influential person in my life as a teenager. I went to her room and she had a Smiths record — that was it for me. Where I grew up, there weren't many kids into that kind of music, so I thought it was, like, *my* thing. My boyfriend at the time listened to hardcore and hip-hop, so I always had to defend them. And I still have to."

Hair: Zaiya Latt/Frame Reps; Makeup: Devra Kinery/Art Department; Shirt: vintage; Skirt: Azzedine Alaia; Shoes: Hollywould; Record player: Restoration Hardware; Headphones: Sony

THE ALBUM THAT
MADE ME A STALKER

MORRISSEY
BONA DRAG
SIRE, 1990
"It went way beyond the Smiths for me. Like, I'm a stalker. Not really! But I did drive past Morrissey's house and I followed him on tour for 10 shows. I don't want to meet him, though. I'd be too nervous. I'd make a fool of myself. His manager saw me on the tour in Boston and told me, 'I said to Morrissey, "That girl Chloë is there." Morrissey said, "You mean the model?"' And I wanted to kill myself that he thinks I'm a model, not an actress. God. That's disappointing."

THE ALBUM THAT
OPENED MY EYES TO POLITICS

BAD BRAINS
I AGAINST I
SST, 1986
"When I was a freshman in high school this was my soundtrack. I was starting to get political – you know, being a freshman – and it's such influential music. That whole thing that surrounded Bad Brains and D.C. hardcore was such an eye-opener to me. I went to see [former lead singer] H.R. twice and both times he didn't show, which was a bummer. He was famous for that, for being crazy. So it was a crazy person who started me thinking about the world as a wider place."

"ROCK & ROLL IS **SEXY AND DIRTY.**"

THE ALBUM THAT
I WAS TOO COOL FOR, FOR TOO LONG

KATE BUSH
THE WHOLE STORY
EMI AMERICA, 1986
"Kate Bush never clicked for me until a few years ago. I thought I was just too cool for it. And then one day I was in a bar in Oslo and the song 'Wuthering Heights' came on. I loved the idea of singing a song from the point of view of a literary heroine. I thought, 'It's time to buy a Kate Bush album.' And then I went out and I bought them all. She's become a mysterious, beautiful figure to me. She's a perfect female pop star."

THE ALBUM THAT
REMINDS ME OF MY FIRST MOVIE

SLINT
SPIDERLAND
TOUCH AND GO, 1991
"There was a Slint song on the *Kids* soundtrack, so it reminds me of my first film. Slint was *the* seminal indie-rock band. Their sound was what everyone copied. They start small and build to this big orgasm. If they hadn't been around, there wouldn't be hundreds of these horrible bands trying to imitate them today. It has cursed them, having bad imitations. But I still listen to this record all the time."

THE ALBUM THAT
MADE ME REALIZE I SUCK AT DRUMS

CAN
EGE BAMYASI
MUTE, 1972
"I was taking drum lessons and the guy teaching me said, 'Bring in an example of how you want to play. And I brought him this record and he just laughed at me and said, 'You'll never be able to play the drums like this!' I wanted to play like Maureen Tucker, you know, standing up. I had this stand-up cocktail drum kit, but it burned in a fire. And that was the end of that, which was sad, but I sucked anyway."

THE ALBUM THAT
WAS MY PARTY SOUNDTRACK

BRIAN ENO
HERE COME THE WARM JETS
EG, 1972
"One Fourth of July, maybe six years ago, all my friends came out to my mom's house – she was out of town – and we had this big party. And we listened to this record over and over again. It's a very strange and difficult album, but it was a very special time: the right group of people and the right weather and mood and somehow the right album. It was the perfect weekend."

THE ALBUM THAT
MADE WE WANT TO WEAR RAGS

ANNIE
THE ORIGINAL BROADWAY CAST
COLUMBIA, 1977
"This was my first favorite record. There's something about an orphan girl. I wanted to dress in tattered rags. 'Hard Knock Life' was my favorite song. It was my first angst song. And when Jay-Z came out with his sampling of it, I was like, 'They stole *Annie*. No!' That song meant so much to me. I have it on vinyl and CD. You can't beat a rags-to-riches story."

THE ALBUM THAT
KEEPS ME OFF THE NEEDLE

NICO
THE MARBLE INDEX
ELEKTRA, 1969
"When I was 21, I used to go into Kim's [record store in New York] and ask the boys there to help me pick out records. They gave me *The Marble Index*. And you just don't hear music like that. I have a real Nico fascination, but I don't want to play her. I try to stay away from the junkie thing; films always glorify junkies. They always make me want to be a drug addict. But look at Nico! Terrible. Still, I cut my bangs like her after I got this record."

THE ALBUM THAT
I CAN'T STAND

THE BEATLES
SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND
CAPITOL, 1967
"I'm not a Beatles lover. I'm kind of a Beatles hater, actually. And I know people will hate me for saying I hate *Sgt. Pepper's*, right? But the greatest rock & roll record of all time? To me, rock & roll is more Rolling Stones, sexy and dirty. They're clever. But there's nothing raw about the Beatles. There's no dirty sex with them. And that's not rock & roll."

T-shirt: vintage; Shorts: Levi's; Boots: Helmut Lang

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SOLVING POP CONUNDRUMS SINCE 2001

DID LINDSEY BUCKINGHAM REALLY KICK STEVIE NICKS ONSTAGE DURING A FLEETWOOD MAC CONCERT?

PAMELA WEST, THOUSAND OAKS, CA

It's true. The incident occurred during one of Fleetwood Mac's craziest periods, when cocaine and whiskey were flowing freely following the massively expensive commercial disaster of their double-album *Tusk*.

In March 1980, before 60,000 people in Auckland, New Zealand, Buckingham started parodying his ex-lover's exotic stage moves, twirling around and pulling his jacket over his head, before running across the stage and interrupting her performance with a swift kick. Nicks somehow managed to ignore the incident and carried on singing.

Backstage afterwards, bandmate Christine McVie slapped Buckingham and threw a glass of wine at him, yelling: "Don't you ever do that to this band again! Ever!"

Buckingham himself was hazy about the incident, saying: "If I kicked her onstage, that was . . . something coming through the veneer. There has been a lot of darkness."

WHAT'S THE STORY WITH MICHAEL JACKSON PAYING DRUG DEALERS WHILE SHOOTING A VIDEO IN RIO?

KENDRA LONG, BATTLE CREEK, MI

Michael himself has never admitted to paying coke dealers to film in a Rio de Janeiro ghetto in 1996. But the controversial shoot for the "They Don't Care About Us" video definitely involved some underhanded transactions that incensed the local authorities.

Jackson and director Spike Lee were welcomed to the Dona Marta neighborhood by a notorious drug-crime chief known as Marcinho VP. The publicity-loving outlaw told the press before the shoot that he had ensured that 50 dangerous-looking locals were paid $70 each to escort their visitors through the streets.

Rio police chief Helio Luz labeled Lee a "fool and a chump" for paying the drug gangs. Lee countered: "I think I was very smart. The police have little authority there."

After all that trouble, Jackson disliked the finished product and had Lee make an alternate version for the U.S. market containing violent news footage and a mock prison riot — shot, wisely, in a studio.

Michael DeWitt: Dude looks like a lady.

Beyoncé is very popular at Mardi Gras.

Missy Elliott

"WHEN I RANG, SHE WAS **JUST ABOUT TO COMMIT SUICIDE.**"

IS IT TRUE THAT BEYONCÉ ONCE SAVED A FAN FROM SUICIDE?

IRENE LOEW, TRENTON, NJ

Yes — according to Beyoncé. In 2002 she told an interviewer that she had helped turn around the life of a depressed teenage girl who sent her a "tragic letter" saying she wanted to die. Beyoncé decided to call. "When I rang, she was just about to commit suicide because she felt so unimportant. But after we spoke she said that she felt visible again and decided that she wanted to live after all. It's one of the things I'm most proud of in my career."

The singer is not the only R&B megastar to save a life with a simple phone call. Missy Elliott's protégée Tweet has often claimed that when she was a struggling artist, she got so depressed she would rehearse ways of killing herself.

Miraculously, her old friend Missy called shortly before Tweet went through with her fateful plan. "The phone rang and I couldn't believe it was Missy asking me to sing background vocals on her [. . . *So Addictive*] album. I call her my guardian angel."

YOUR QUESTIONS

***Ask Blender**, 1040 Sixth Avenue, 22nd floor, New York, NY 10018*
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Please include your first and last name, your hometown and your state or province. Cool!

WHO IS THE GUY WEARING THE BRA ON NIRVANA'S *IN UTERO* CD?

ALEJANDRO XAVIER, BERKELEY, CA

Frances Bean's former nanny, Michael "Cali" DeWitt. Originally a Hole roadie, he was taken on because of his forgiving attitude toward his employers' bad habits. Despite his lack of child-care qualifications, DeWitt reportedly bonded well with Frances Bean.

His in-drag appearance on *In Utero*'s CD artwork initially had no great significance but later caused much speculation because he was one of the last known people to speak to Kurt Cobain before his death. DeWitt, who was living in the singer's house, claims he and his girlfriend were awakened around 6 A.M. on April 2 by Cobain. After a brief conversation, Cobain left; his body was found a few days later. (DeWitt is inevitably implicated as an accomplice in Kurt's death by Courtney-accusing conspiracy theorists and by authors Max Wallace and Ian Halperin in their book *Love & Death: The Murder of Kurt Cobain*.) [BLENDER]

Beyoncé: Richard Phibbs/Corbis Outline; Elliott: Jim Spellman/WireImage.com; CD: Alphonse Telymonde

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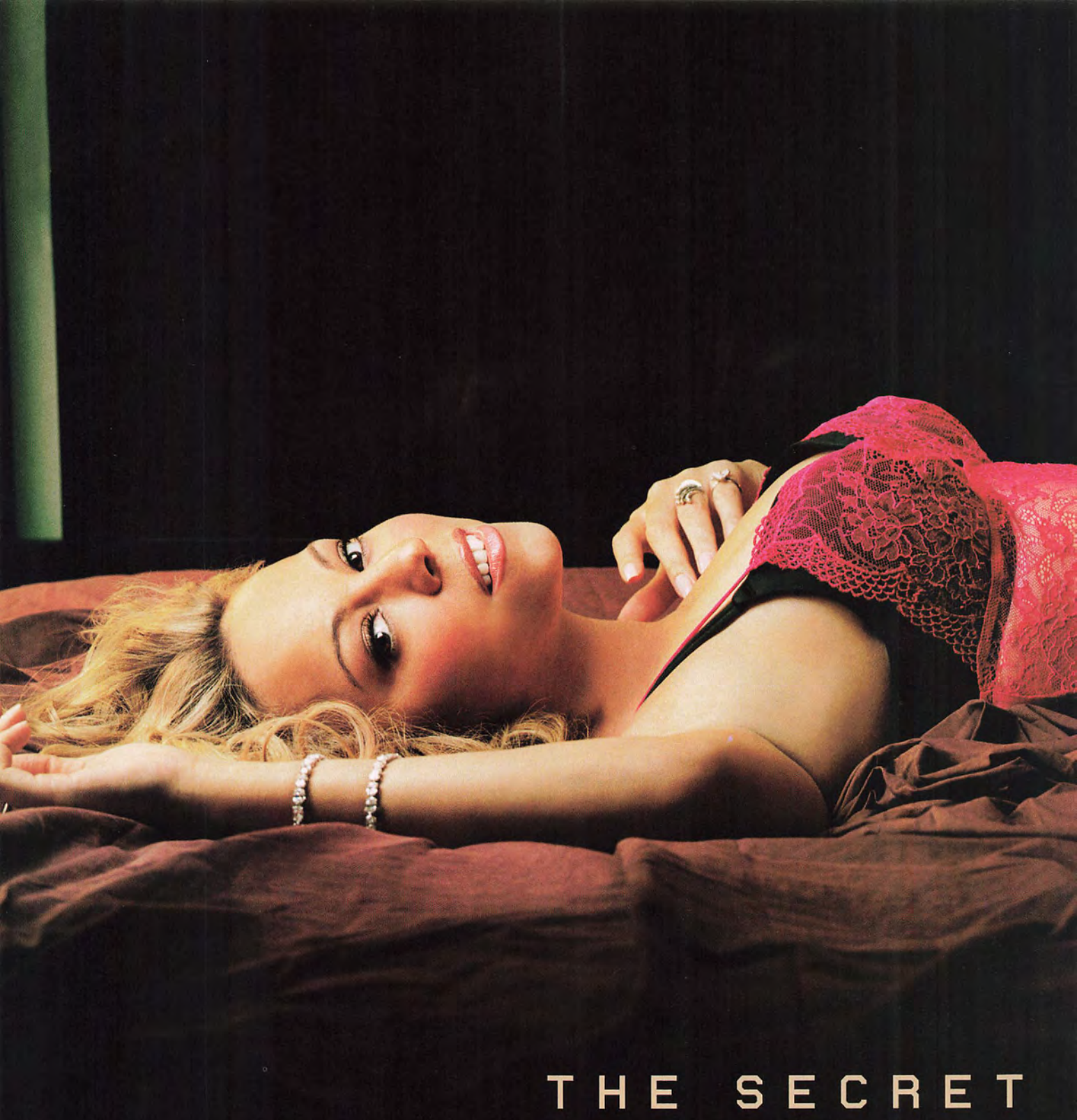
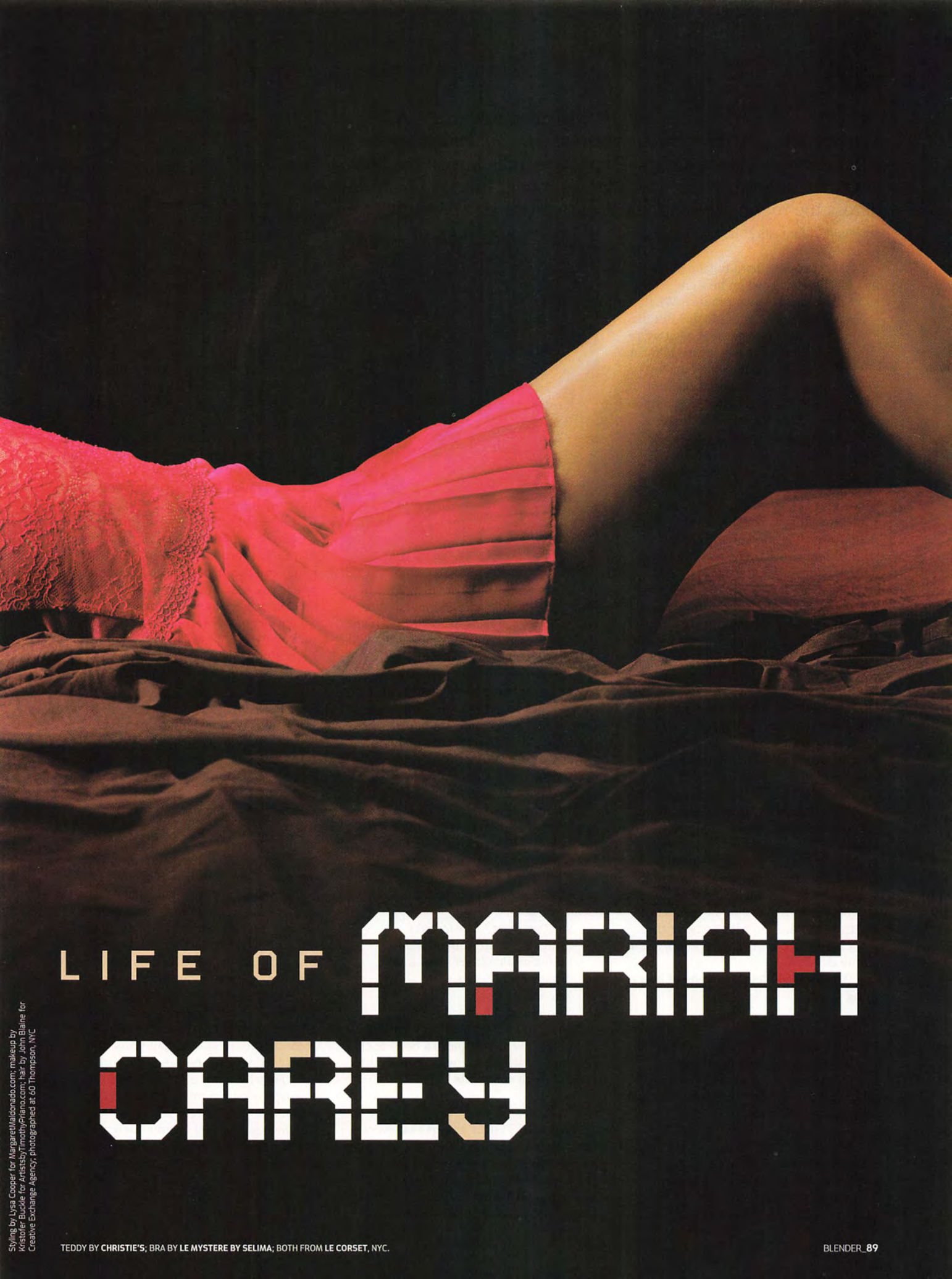
TOUCH



THE SECRET

SHE'S THE SUPER-PRIVATE DIVA WHO DOESN'T SPEAK FOR DAYS AT A TIME. BUT, FOR *BLENDER*, **MARIAH CAREY** OPENS UP ABOUT HER "HORRIFIC" CHILDHOOD, HER FRIEND ODB — AND HOW TO SPEND $28 MILLION.

BY WILLIAM SHAW
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES WHITE



LIFE OF MARIAH CAREY

Styling by Lysa Cooper for MargaretMaldonado.com; makeup by Kristofer Buckle for ArtistsbyTimothyPriano.com; hair by John Blaine for Creative Exchange Agency; photographed at 60 Thompson, NYC

TEDDY BY **CHRISTIE'S**; BRA BY **LE MYSTERE BY SELIMA**; BOTH FROM **LE CORSET**, NYC.

IN HIS OFFICE, Island Def Jam chairman Antonio "L.A." Reid is playing tracks from the unfinished CD *The Emancipation of Mimi*. The volume is high. A Dyptique candle burns; the *Mona Lisa* screensaver on his 20" iMac smirks at him as he strides across the room, grinning madly as he plays air keyboards.

"Isn't it fantastic?" he asks as he dances.

It is, of course, hard to take the head of a label seriously when he's enthusing so wildly about his own product. What else is he going to do? But that aside, it's clear that what we're listening to is a return to form, of sorts. It may not be a '90s vintage, multi-multi-platinum piece of finely honed diva pop. But it is a compulsively listenable collection of vibrant, self-assured, dare we say *understated* R&B songs.

And hovering around the album, swooping in and out of each song, is the Voice. If it ever went away, it's back. That sometimes-husky, sometimes-silky thing that is stretchier than elastic and yet simultaneously accurate to at least ten decimal places.

It's been a long journey for 34-year-old singer Mariah Carey. From her position as the MOR queen of the early '90s, she cleverly reinvented herself in the second half of the decade as R&B's first lady with a series of high-profile hip-hop collaborations. Financially, *The Emancipation* isn't ever going to be the runaway 25-million seller that 1993's *Music Box* was, but these are clearly songs from someone who's as artistically sure-footed as she's ever been.

L.A. Reid leans across the desk. "The real thing I've learned about Mariah," he says, "is that she's an innocent. At heart, she's a little child."

"Really?" says *Blender* skeptically. After selling tens of millions of records worldwide, after being married to one of the most powerful people in the record industry and dealing with some of the most hardnosed names in hip-hop, she's a little child?

"Yes," insists Reid. "In spite of everything . . . ."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FROM AN e-mail exchange with Mariah:

In your head, what age are you?

"For better or for worse . . . I am eternally 12. I'm stuck in 7th grade and I just keep getting left back."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

AT THE APPOINTED time, Carey sweeps into Lure for our face-to-face interview. It's a large but chic fish restaurant in Manhattan. The maitre d' flutters.

Performing at the 1991 Grammy Awards.

As always, Carey has a small retinue in tow. Her new manager, Benny Medina, who is never far away, places himself at the sort of distance that is tactful but still within eyebrow-raising distance.

The same team was there last night, too, at the photo session, along with Jack, Carey's Jack Russell. Then, Carey had been polite, deliberately un-pop-star-like, inquiring, "How's your hotel? And the weather where you're from?" with the sort of solicitousness of one keen to avoid appearing too diva-esque.

Tonight she's taking time out from a last-minute session re-recording vocals for a track with Jermaine Dupri. She freely admits she hates doing interviews when she's in what she calls her recording phase, but what can you do? Time clearly presses.

Shall we order? Blender asks.

"Sure. What are you getting?"

I think we should get some skewers.

"That's cool."

You like chicken?

"I'm not in the mood for it."

She scans the menu, not wanting anything. She eventually picks a bowl of clam chowder, of which she will toy with three or four small spoonfuls.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THERE ARE THREE things that every feature about Mariah Carey will mention; let's get them out of the way:

1. At 18 she was spotted by Sony Music mogul Tommy Mottola; they married in 1993 and split four years later.

2. In 2001, shortly before the release of her flop movie *Glitter*, she had a very public breakdown, gabbling nonsensically on MTV before checking herself into rehab.

3. Famously, she has a five-octave range. (Actually it's probably closer to four and a half, but even that's technically pretty remarkable. Occasionally journalists will say she has a seven-octave range, but that would make her a cross between a bat and Paul Robeson.)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

TONIGHT, AFTER THE interview, she will return to the studio to complete work on her tenth studio album. What sets *The Emancipation of Mimi* apart from Carey's discography is that it takes aboard the new spirit of R&B authenticity brought to the table by singers like Alicia Keys. Carey says much of it was recorded live, which makes it much more organic-sounding than anything she's done before. She'd find herself picking up a riff from the guitar player, or singing a part for the horn players to repeat. "They hear where you're going and they'll take you to a place where you may not have gone."

The track "Say Something," with Snoop Dogg, was recorded in L.A. with the Neptunes. "I love Snoop," she says. Every time they meet, he tells her how much her debut single, "Vision of Love," meant to him. "That's, like, my song," he says. He was in prison when he heard it. It was his favorite behind-bars tune.

She likes to repeat Snoop's anecdote. It underlines a point she is keen on making: As far as she's concerned, right from the start, she's always been an R&B singer. Her real home has always been urban America.

In L.A., Snoop, Nelly, Pharrell Williams and she were all in the studio together. That in itself was a radical departure for Carey, who usually demands to be alone in the room when she sings. "So it was all of us hanging out, and it was really fun. It was probably like it was in the old days — like in the Motown era, you know what I mean?"

Alongside the sessions in L.A. and Jermaine Dupri's studio in Atlanta, much of *Mimi* was laid down in her preferred recording location of recent years, the posh Mediterranean island of Capri.

"They leave me alone in Capri. The townspeople treat me like I was born there. It's very 'Ciao, Maria!'"

She spends a lot of time there now. She'll be there at the studio up at the top of the hill until six in the morning, watching the sun come up over the sea through the studio's big glass windows.

That's where she recorded her ➔

Frank Micelotta/Retna Ltd.

LACE TOP AND PANTIES BY **JEZEBEL** TAP PANTS BY **ILLISA** AT ANTIQUE COLLECTION; BUTTERFLY RING BY **CARTIER** ALL OTHER JEWELRY BY **ILLIANA MAKRI**

"Holy crap! I've got boobies!" In Capri, 2003.

favorite track on the album, the if-Motown-went-gospel soul of "Fly Like a Bird" — a song that sees her return to the full-on vocal backflips of the old days. It's a spiritual song she dreamed up in the moments before she went to sleep one morning. She roused the studio back up so she could demo the tune. Later she recorded it properly, gazing out the Capri studio's window, inspired by the sight of clouds in the Mediterranean sky.

Mariah is a night owl who usually sees mornings only from the wrong side. She's never found sleeping easy. Exhaustion was one of the factors that contributed to her breakdown in 2001.

"It's still an issue with me," she admits. "It's not so bad. It's a question of getting myself solidly balanced. But I'm much better at sleeping because I have to be."

She's learned to take regular breaks. She relaxes at home with her cat Willy D and the dog Jack, playing *The Sims* on her Mac or watching movies like *Mean Girls*. There are days she doesn't speak. Friends call her and she doesn't pick up. Instead she texts them: "I'm having a vocal rest." She's aware it sounds ridiculous, especially when they answer mockingly, "That's a good one. I'm having one tomorrow."

L.A. Reid said he thinks you're happiest at Disney World on a roller coaster.

"He did? Well, he asked me if I believed in Santa Claus."

Which of course you do.

"I do."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THE THING IS, the Voice and Carey's psyche are closely linked. In surprising ways, the Voice is a big part of who she is.

"I feel like it's always been my secret, my voice. Ever since I was little."

Like all the best stars, Carey had an unhappy childhood. She is the daughter of an Irish-American opera singer and a Venezuelan/African-American aeronautical engineer.

There's a photograph of her, age 3. She sometimes looks at it and recognizes the child's eyes, but to her there's something really sad in them. It's as if, she says, "they've seen the horror." It would have been taken at the time her parents were going through their split, which was acrimonious. Afterwards, Carey's mom, Patricia, raised her. She lived with her brother Morgan, who was nine years older, and sister Alison, ten years older. As a child, Morgan was diagnosed with cerebral palsy; sister Alison became pregnant at 15, got involved in drugs and prostitution and contracted HIV.

↑ "Bye bye, film career!" Arriving at the screening of megabomb *Glitter*, September 2001.

With ODB, May 2003.

Carey says she saw "a lot of messed up stuff around the house." With her mother having to work long hours to support them, the older siblings would be left in charge, but Carey frequently found herself alone when her siblings bunked off. The radio kept her company.

"Maybe I grew up a little too soon. I think I did. Maybe because of that, I held on to that beautiful quality of childhood."

She grew up insecure, uncertain of who she was. "Being biracial, not being pretty . . . having such a difficult upbringing in a lot of ways," she says. "I don't like to say that, because it sounds 'woe is me,' but music brought me out of it."

LIKE ALL THE BEST STARS, CAREY HAD AN UNHAPPY CHILDHOOD.

In fact, she remembers exactly the moment when the Voice became an important part of who she was and — more important — who she was going to be. She was in first or second grade, walking along the street with her friend Maureen and singing a song from *South Pacific* — they were performing it in school. Mariah didn't even notice that Maureen had stopped singing along with her until she told Mariah, "When you sing it's like there's music that plays with your voice."

It was one of the first moments she ever started to feel confident in herself. From then on she convinced herself that the Voice would make her a star, would take her away from all this.

She started listening to Morgan's Stevie Wonder and Gladys Knight records, wondering how Minnie Ripperton did that thing with her high notes. "This," she told herself as she practiced, "is going to take me where I need to go."

Even later, in high school, when she wouldn't even tell her school friends about it, or she'd even sing deliberately badly to disguise her talent, she'd know. *I'm just as good as everybody else. Because I have this secret. This gift. This thing I know they can't do. You just wait.*

Unbidden, a waiter brings some sushi. "That's sweet! Thank you."

It sits on the table for a while.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BECAUSE SHE WAS raised by her mother the opera singer, everyone assumes that's where the Voice came from.

But Mariah will remind you her black father grew up in the Pentecostal church. Indeed, her parents were married in the Mount Sinai Pentecostal church on Harlem's 137th Street and Lenox Avenue. Her mother might have provided the

Clockwise from top: Alpha/Globe Photos; Mychal Watts/Wireimage.com; Lester Cohan/Wireimage.com

genetic material, but gospel ran in Carey's blood as well.

So as she grew up tuning in to the New York R&B station WBLS when she was left alone in the house, it all made sense to her. In fact, growing up with a white mother in a white neighborhood, the Voice was a way for her to rediscover her blackness.

Seventy-five percent of the female contestants on American Idol *try to emulate your vocal style. Are you aware that you've spawned a lot of truly terrible singers?*

She laughs. "I'm sorry about that," she apologizes. "But I don't really watch those shows."

You first hit the charts 15 years ago this year. There's a new generation of female singers out there — Hilary Duff, Lindsay Lohan [one of her ex-husband Tommy Mottola's signings]. Do you ever wonder where you fit in?

"I've never looked at myself as a Top 40 artist — although other people did–"

Your ex-husband, for instance?

She laughs briefly, but ignores the bait. "I was an R&B singer first, and R&B fans are less about trends. When they love you, you have a fan base. Pop is a different thing."

So what advice would you give this new generation?

"I don't feel they need advice. They started in a different way from me — in a way that's very foreign to me. I had to really struggle. I had a difficult childhood. Music was my solace. If you love it, do it. If you don't love it, leave it alone."

We'd better eat some of this sushi. The chef will be mad at us if we don't.

"Yeah," she agrees. She picks a single morsel of fish, dips it in the chili, and eats it.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

LAST NOVEMBER SHE woke after sleeping 15 hours, tired from working late in Atlanta. When she picked up her pager, she saw all the messages. One was from urban music entrepreneur Damon Dash. "I'm sorry to have to tell you that ODB passed away."

Ol' Dirty Bastard represented a crucial turning point in her career. In 1995 she was moving away from Tommy Mottola's vision of her, figuring out who she could be by herself. It was Carey who insisted that he release a Sean Combs remix of "Fantasy" featuring Dirty, from the edgiest New York crew of the time, the Wu-Tang Clan. At the time, few of her audience would have even heard of them, let alone ODB.

Once and for all, the track cemented Carey's links to the hip-hop community; it remains one of the greatest moments ➜

Top: Keibun Miyamoto/Retna Ltd.; Bottom: Oliver Polter/Alpha/Globe Photos

THE ESSENTIAL MARIAH

NINE EXAMPLES OF THE ETERNAL PLEASURES OF TOP-40 OVEREMOTING

1
"VISION OF LOVE"
MARIAH CAREY *COLUMBIA, 1990*
The ur-Mariah power ballad, Carey's debut single announced, loudly, a new player in the octave-hurtling diva stakes.
BEST MOMENT Mariah unleashes an a capella melisma assault, warbling the word "all" for seven hair-raising seconds. (3:00)

2
"I DIDN'T MEAN TO TURN YOU ON"
GLITTER *VIRGIN, 2001*
Minneapolis synth attack! Mariah steps into a time warp with a period-perfect cover of Cherrelle's 1984 club smash.
BEST MOMENT While Carey scat-sings, Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis whip the keyboards into a veritable electrofunk maelstrom. (2:50)

3
"MAKE IT HAPPEN"
EMOTIONS *COLUMBIA, 1991*
As Mariah intones some inspirational platitudes, a house-y keyboard vamp and splashy hi-hat push the song off the soapbox and into the disco.
BEST MOMENT "I was abandoned and alone/Without a penny to my name/. . . Without the shoes upon my feet/Sometimes I couldn't even eat." Whatever you say, Mrs. Mottola. (0:31)

4
"ALWAYS BE MY BABY"
DAYDREAM *COLUMBIA, 1995*
Mariah and Jermaine Dupri team up for the first time. Result: four minutes of bubblegum bliss.
BEST MOMENT The hook: "Doo-Da-Doo, Doo-Da-Doo-Da-Doop-Da-Dow." (0:25, 1:38, 3:52)

5
"ONE SWEET DAY"
MARIAH CAREY & BOYZ II MEN
DAYDREAM *COLUMBIA, 1995*
Carey and Philly's smoovest close-harmony quartet pay extravagant three-hankie tribute to their dead homiez, in the ballad that spent more weeks (16) atop the *Billboard* Hot 100 singles chart than any song, ever.
BEST MOMENT Just when you thought it couldn't get any huger, the song surges up an octave. (3:20)

6
"FANTASY"
DAYDREAM *COLUMBIA, 1995*
The lyric is goofy, Mariah's ululating is poofy — but that Tom Tom Club "Genius of Love" sample is foolproof.
BEST MOMENT Halfway through, Carey croons the Tom Tom Club's original refrain. (2:53)

7
"HEARTBREAKER" (FEAT. JAY-Z)
RAINBOW *COLUMBIA, 1999*
A discofied variation on the eternal "men are such dogs" theme, starring Jay-Z as the callous rake.
BEST MOMENT Hova's rap steals the show. "She wanna answer the phone, tattoo her arm/That's when I gotta send her back to her mom." (2:42)

8
"LOVERBOY (REMIX)" (FEAT. DA BRAT, LUDACRIS, TWENTY II, SHAWNNA)
GLITTER *VIRGIN, 2001*
Newly divorced, Mariah finds herself a boy toy.
BEST MOMENT Tommy Mottola's ears burn: "I got myself a lover/Who knows what I like/And when he invites me over/I come every time." (1:06)

9
"DREAMLOVER"
MUSIC BOX *COLUMBIA, 1993*
Carey's song for the ages: a perfect single, as timeless a piece of radio pop as anything produced by the Brill Building.
BEST MOMENT That groovy Hammond organ solo. (2:43) *JODY ROSEN*

At Halloween party, 2003.

Mariah covers up her "I love Tommy Mottola very, very much" thigh tattoo.

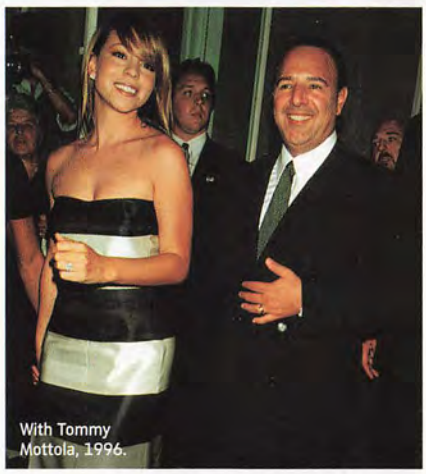
of her back catalogue. These days, as Carey acknowledges, the remix has eclipsed the original. "The classic now is the urban version. It's one of my favorite records ever."

She loved ODB — the way he insisted on wearing a wig in the "Fantasy" video. He, too, was a sort of innocent. "He was just so into it, and present. He loved doing what he did. Even when he was clowning, he really took it seriously."

She met up with Dirty when he was released from prison in 2003. She feels he should never have been sent there.

"I think that contributed to whatever it was that brought him down," she says sadly. "It's tough, because I feel that some people go through such deep stuff that it drives them to do things that are detrimental to their health. One thing leads to another, and it ends up killing them."

A waiter shimmers up to the table and suggests a glass of wine. Carey hesitates, declines. "If I had one, I'd be up all night. Maybe I should have some beverage — like cranberry or orange juice.



With Tommy Mottola, 1996.

How many calories would that be?"

The waiter doesn't know quite how to answer that one.

Carey glances around. At the next table they're drinking something pink. "That looks really good."

The waiter tells her they're strawberry martinis.

Carey's face falls. In the end she requests a fruit juice and soda. In a little glass. With a straw.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THE BIGGEST AND best-known failure in Mariah Carey's platinum career was the movie *Glitter*. It arrived at just the time when everyone was happy to see the great Mariah — the biggest-selling female artist of the '90s — fall flat on her face.

She has given up trying too hard to defend the movie. "It was," she now acknowledges, "all over the place. It's one of those things that was thrown together. But it doesn't matter, 'cause it made me stronger."

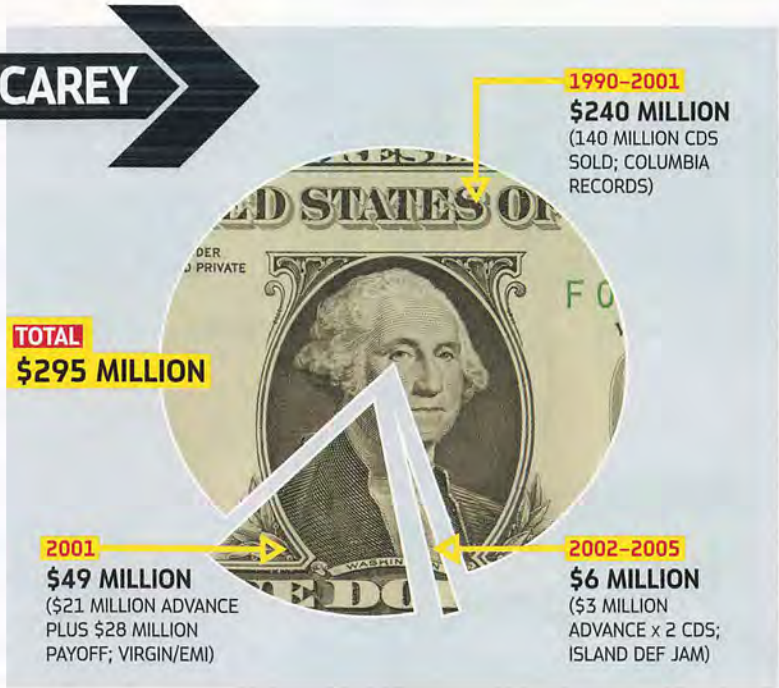
The scale of its multimillion-dollar failure totally overshadowed the fact that her performance in the following year's indie thriller *Wisegirls* was actually, well, pretty impressive; she plays a sassy waitress working in a mob-owned Italian restaurant. The movie gained her a standing ovation at Sundance, but she put her movie career on hold last year to work on *The Emancipation of Mimi*.

Top: James White; Bottom: Bill Davila/Retna Ltd.

CASH AND CAREY

IT'S NOT JUST Mariah Carey's voice that's huge: Her bankbook is equally gaudy. Over the course of 15 years and 13 albums, Carey has earned, according to industry sources, a staggering $295 million from CD sales and recording advances.

Most of the loot was earned during her run at Columbia Records, in which she became the biggest-selling female artist in Soundscan history. Fans of failing upwards should note the $28 million she earned in 2002, when her new backers, Virgin/EMI, reeling from the dismal sales of the *Glitter* soundtrack, handsomely paid her off to leave the label. Nice work if you can get it. PETER KAFKA



The other consequence of that failure was that when the movie's soundtrack album, *Glitter*, failed to match Carey's previous track record, selling a mere two million, the company, Virgin, dropped her with a $28 million dollar payoff.

Rumor No. 1: You've squandered all that money you were given by Virgin/EMI.

"On what?" she says archly.

You don't have a personal yacht on Capri yet?

"No. I'm a very practical person. I'm very conservative. That sort of thing makes me laugh. It's so wild."

But people expect it of you.

"Yeah. And I'm not saying I don't buy diamonds. I just bought a new bracelet yesterday," she says showing off the sizeable rocks that adorn her right wrist. "But I didn't even used to buy the stuff until I learned that this" — she rattles the jewels — "is an investment. It could be in the bank but it's on me. I haven't bought a fleet of cars. I don't know about cars."

So, rumor No. 2: You didn't buy a $318,000 Mercedes Maybach the other day?

"No! I do have a Mercedes, but living in New York I don't care about what I roll in. For me it's just a place to put my bag."

How un-diva-like.

"I know. I'll pretend for the sake of this article, though."

She buys shoes, of course. Too many to wear. But she says that's because of the New York winter she spent wearing her mother's size-too-small shoes and swearing that one day she'd have a whole room full of shoes. Which she now does.

Rumor No. 3: You're going out with a 28-year-old employee of yours [who happens to be sitting two tables away right now with her manager].

The Carey jaw drops for a second. There's rare a flash of irritation. "Oh. Honestly! At this stage in my life, I'm not even getting into that stuff. I'm not getting tied down in any relationship." Pause. Then, just in case we're getting the wrong idea. "I don't have casual flings either."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BENNY MEDINA, HER aforesaid manager, flits up to the table, checking if she's OK. He sees she's barely eaten a thing and suggests it would be a good idea to have some food before they return to the studio. It will be a long night.

"I'M NOT GETTING TIED DOWN IN ANY RELATIONSHIP."

She tells him she wants to eat but doesn't want to order in front of the *Blender* journalist because she doesn't want us to know what she orders.

You do stuff like that when you're Mariah Carey.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

MARIAH CAREY LIKES to play the innocent. Of course, you wonder just how innocent someone can be who has fought so doggedly to get to where she wants, has earned millions, clearly has a canny business head and who has remained on top of her game for a decade and a half. Not that innocent.

But she's clearly in love with the idea of innocence. Which isn't a surprise. It's a compensation for having to grow up too young, first with her family and then again when as a teenager she started dating a man 20 years her elder. She has sung about that young girl growing up, trying to cling to innocence, on songs like "Petals" or "Close My Eyes."

But, curiously, listening to the new album, it's clear there's nothing about her childhood on it — except for the title itself, *The Emancipation of Mimi*. "Mimi" was a childhood nickname given her by friends and family. And that's why it's an emancipation. She doesn't feel like writing those songs right now. This is happy Mariah. "This was really kind of 'let me have some fun.'" It's about realizing she's free now. "I'm not saying anything negative about anybody from the past. I'm not dealing with an oppressive structure. Everything is OK. I'm making a record. This is fun. And this," she says proudly, "is why I started singing."

The waiters start arriving with trays of succulent food, compliments of the chef. She thanks them warmly and profusely.

And then departs, the food untouched. [BLENDER]

Carey: Jim Spellman/Wireimage.com

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"YO MAMA!"

Whether it's Elton insulting Madonna or Jay-Z dissing R. Kelly, pop stars love to talk snap about each other. But what are rock & roll's greatest-ever bitch-slaps? And why does everyone hate Fred Durst so much?

COMPILED BY CLARK COLLIS

Rick Diamond/Wireimage.com

LOVE ME DON'T

BERATING THE BEATLES

"Fucking Paul McCartney's a gay bastard. He's like, 'Look, I found somebody with one leg.'"
SHARON OSBOURNE

"I'd swap two Pauls for a George."
JOHN LENNON

"Paul . . . No, just joking."
YOKO ONO AFTER BEING ASKED WHO, AFTER JOHN LENNON, WAS HER FAVORITE BEATLE

"WHO?"

BRITNEY SPEARS AFTER BEING ASKED IF SHE WAS 'N SYNC'S YOKO ONO

BETTER DEAD THAN FRED

YOU KNOW THAT GUY EVERYONE LIKES? HE'S NOT FRED DURST.

"He's an asshole; he's burned a lot of bridges. Nobody likes him. I mean, his guitarist left the band because Fred is such a cock."
SCOTT STAPP

"If I just sat there and pointed, maybe I could be a producer, but if it required any technical proficiencies, I'd be an utter failure. But maybe not – who knows? Doesn't Fred Durst produce things? How much skill can he have?"
DAVE MATTHEWS

"TWO WORDS FOR FRED DURST, OKAY? *BRET MICHAELS.*"
COURTNEY LOVE

GET IN THE RING

AND INSULT AXL ROSE

"They're really talentless people, and they write crap music, and they're the most popular rock band on the Earth right now. I can't believe it."
KURT COBAIN ON GUNS N' ROSES

"I just wish the fucker would get the fuckin' record out so I could see why he took something so cool and systematically destroyed it."
SLASH

"If I was as ugly as Axl, I'd be pissed off about cameras going off in my face too!"
TED NUGENT

THE PASSION OF THE CHRISTINA

WE LOVE CHRISTINA AGUILERA. OTHER PEOPLE . . . NOT SO MUCH.

"She has an amazing voice, undeniably, but that doesn't change the fact that she's one of the world's biggest cunts."
KELLY OSBOURNE

"I'VE SEEN DRAG QUEENS WHO LOOK BETTER."
KELLY OSBOURNE, AGAIN

"She's an ungrateful, spoiled-rotten asshole."
FRED DURST

PLAYA HATAS

HIP-HOPPERS PUT THE "RAP" INTO "YOU'RE CRAP"

"[R. Kelly] has problems with the love people give me – he's insecure."
JAY-Z

"He can't fuck with me. I'm bigger than him and he's mad. The reason is, he's a bitch and that's what bitches do."
JA RULE ON DMX

"He has a great, unique talent and smooth, white hair. Just like a beagle's nut sack."
TRIUMPH THE INSULT COMIC DOG ON EMINEM

"He ain't but a buck and some change. Stuart Little–looking motherfucker."
DMX ON JA RULE

"I RESPECT EVERYBODY... EXCEPT VANILLA ICE."
ICE CUBE

Beatles: Norman Parkinson Limited/Fiona Cowan/Corbis; Durst: Nina Prommer/Globe Photos; Matthews: Dimitrios Kambouris/Wireimage.com; Ono: Bettmann/Corbis; Rose: George Chin/Wireimage.com; Aguilera: Arnold Turner/Wireimage.com; Triumph: Lego

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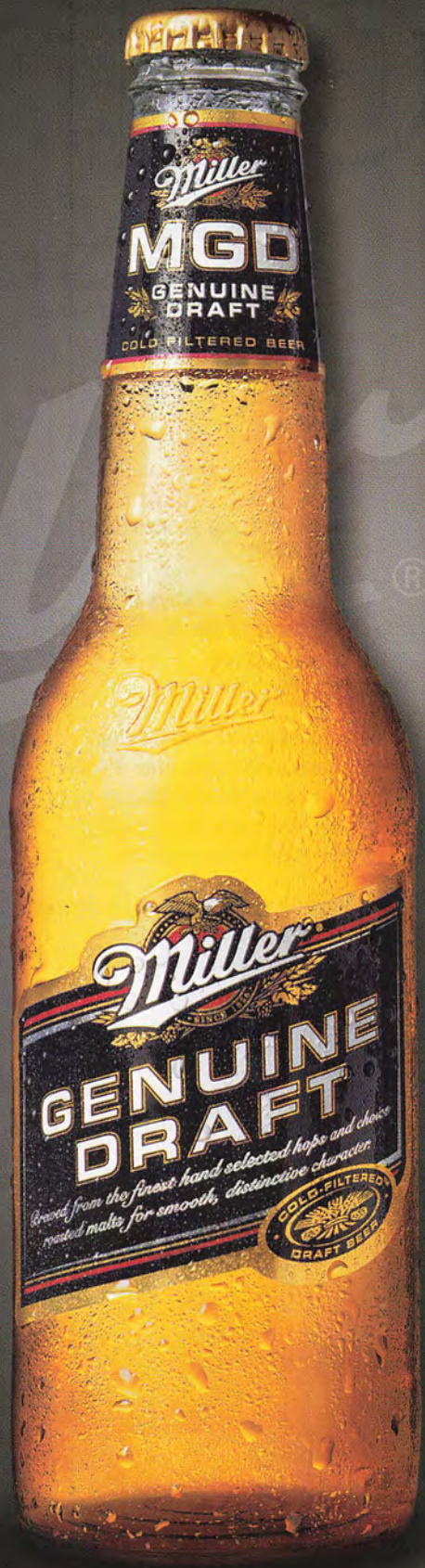
COLD-FILTERING TWICE MAKES A BEER VERY, VERY SMOOTH.

THAT'S WHY WE COLD-FILTER OUR BEER FOUR TIMES.



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LIVE THROUGH *THIS*

COURTNEY LOVE REAPS WHAT SHE SOWS, INSULT-WISE

"THAT'S WONDERFUL, ALTHOUGH YOU ARE THE WORST GUITARIST I'VE EVER HEARD."

JOE STRUMMER TO COURTNEY LOVE IN THE LATE '80S, AFTER SHE INFORMED HIM SHE WAS STARTING A BAND

"NINE INCHES? I DON'T THINK SO! FOUR INCHES IS MORE LIKE IT!"

COURTNEY LOVE ON TRENT REZNOR

"IN HER PROFESSIONAL DEALINGS, LOVE IS IRRATIONAL, MERCURIAL, SELF-CENTERED, UNMANAGEABLE, INCONSISTENT AND UNPREDICTABLE."

DAVE GROHL AND KRIST NOVOSELIC IN COURT COMMENTS

"SHE NEEDS SHOOTING, AND I'LL SHOOT HER."

THE TEARDROP EXPLODES' **JULIAN COPE**

STICKS AND STONES

EVEN THE ROLLING STONES CAN'T GET NO RESPECT

"[Mick Jagger's] always been chickenshit to get onstage with the Beach Boys."

THE BEACH BOYS' **MIKE LOVE**

"It would be awful to be like Keith Richards. He's pathetic. It's like a monkey with arthritis trying to go on stage and look young."

ELTON JOHN ON KEITH RICHARDS

"[His writing is limited to] songs for dead blondes."

KEITH RICHARDS ON ELTON JOHN

"IT SHOULD BE CALLED 'DOGSHIT IN THE DOORWAY.'"

KEITH RICHARDS RETITLES MICK JAGGER'S SOLO ALBUM, *GODDESS IN THE DOORWAY*

CHART ATTACK

WHO COULD DISLIKE OUR LOVELY, FLUFFY POP STARS? EVERYONE!

"Madonna's got this gold tooth in her mouth all the time and all this shit around her eyes. She looks like Beetlejuice or something."

MARK WAHLBERG

"I THOUGHT IT WAS THE MOST OBNOXIOUS MOMENT IN TELEVISION HISTORY."

STEVIE NICKS ON MADONNA KISSING BRITNEY SPEARS AT THE MTV VIDEO MUSIC AWARDS

"It scares the hell out of me — so imagine what it does to 5-year-olds."

THE DANDY WARHOLS' **COURTNEY TAYLOR** ON MICHAEL JACKSON'S FACE

"Nick and Jessica — lovely people, but they're not really all that smart."

JACK OSBOURNE

ROCK OF RAGES

MY ROCK BAND'S BETTER THAN YOUR BAND. *NYAAAH, NYAAAH, NYAAAH-NYAAAH, NYAAAH.*

"Metallica have turned into a bunch of fucking corporate pigs. Suck my dick."

MÖTLEY CRÜE'S **NIKKI SIXX**

"Chris Martin looks like a fucking geography teacher."

OASIS'S **LIAM GALLAGHER**

"I went to see U2's film *Rattle & Hum* and afterwards I just thought, 'How can you not be horrified with yourselves? How can you actually let this thing be released when it makes every single person in it look like the biggest asshole ever?'"

THE BEASTIE BOYS' **MIKE D**

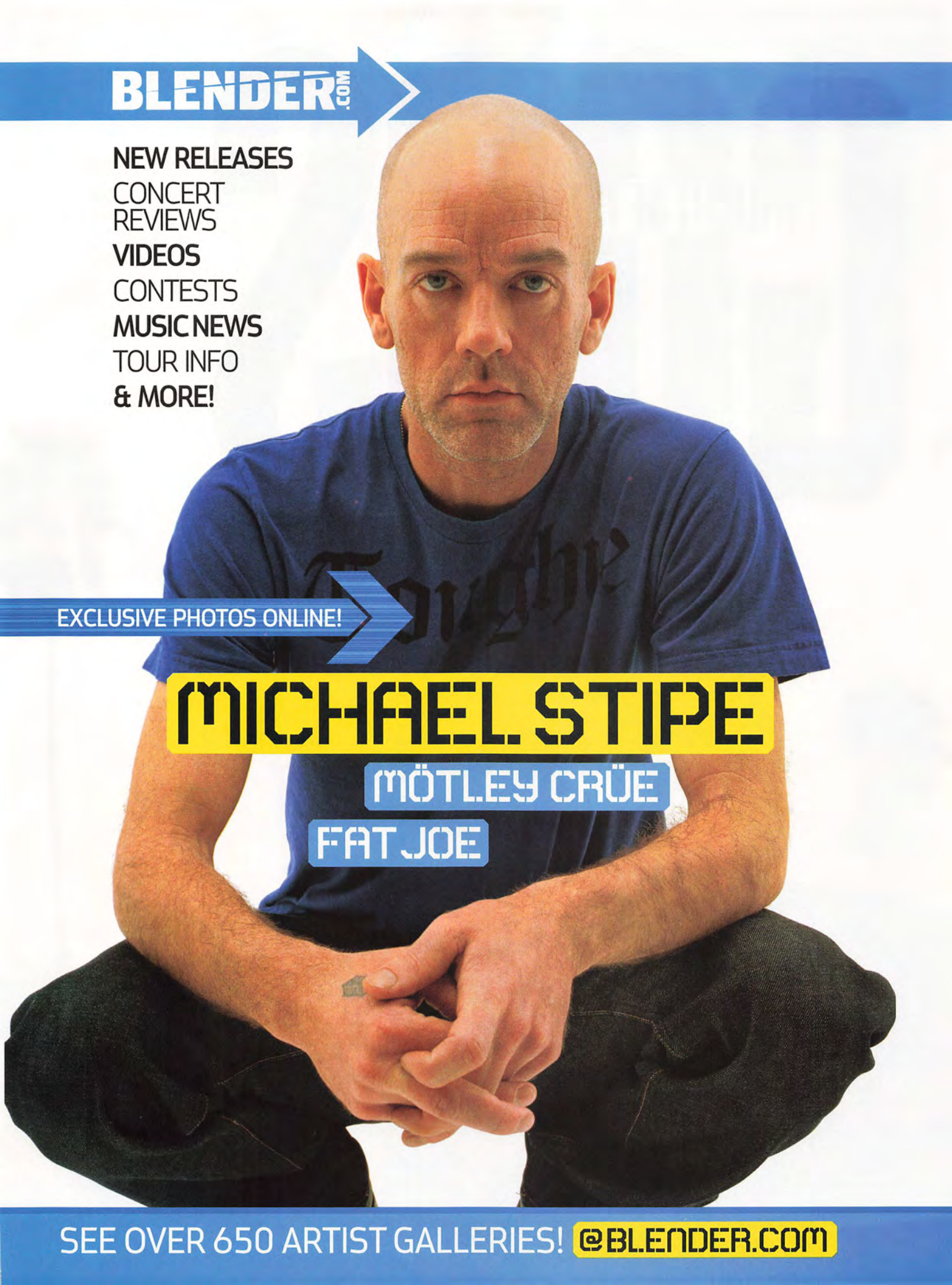
"THEY MAKE ME NOT WANT TO PLAY MUSIC."

THE STROKES' **ALBERT HAMMOND** ON JET

"We're down-to-earth, real motherfuckers, and any band with their background can kiss my arse."

JET'S **CHRIS CESTER** ON THE STROKES

Strummer: Dave Bennett/Getty Images; Love: Kevin Mazur/Wireimage.com; Jagger/Richards: Kevin Mazur/Wireimage.com; Spears/Madonna: Dave Hogan/Getty Images; Osbourne: Jeffrey Mayer/Wireimage.com; Gallagher: Matrix/Bauer-Griffin.com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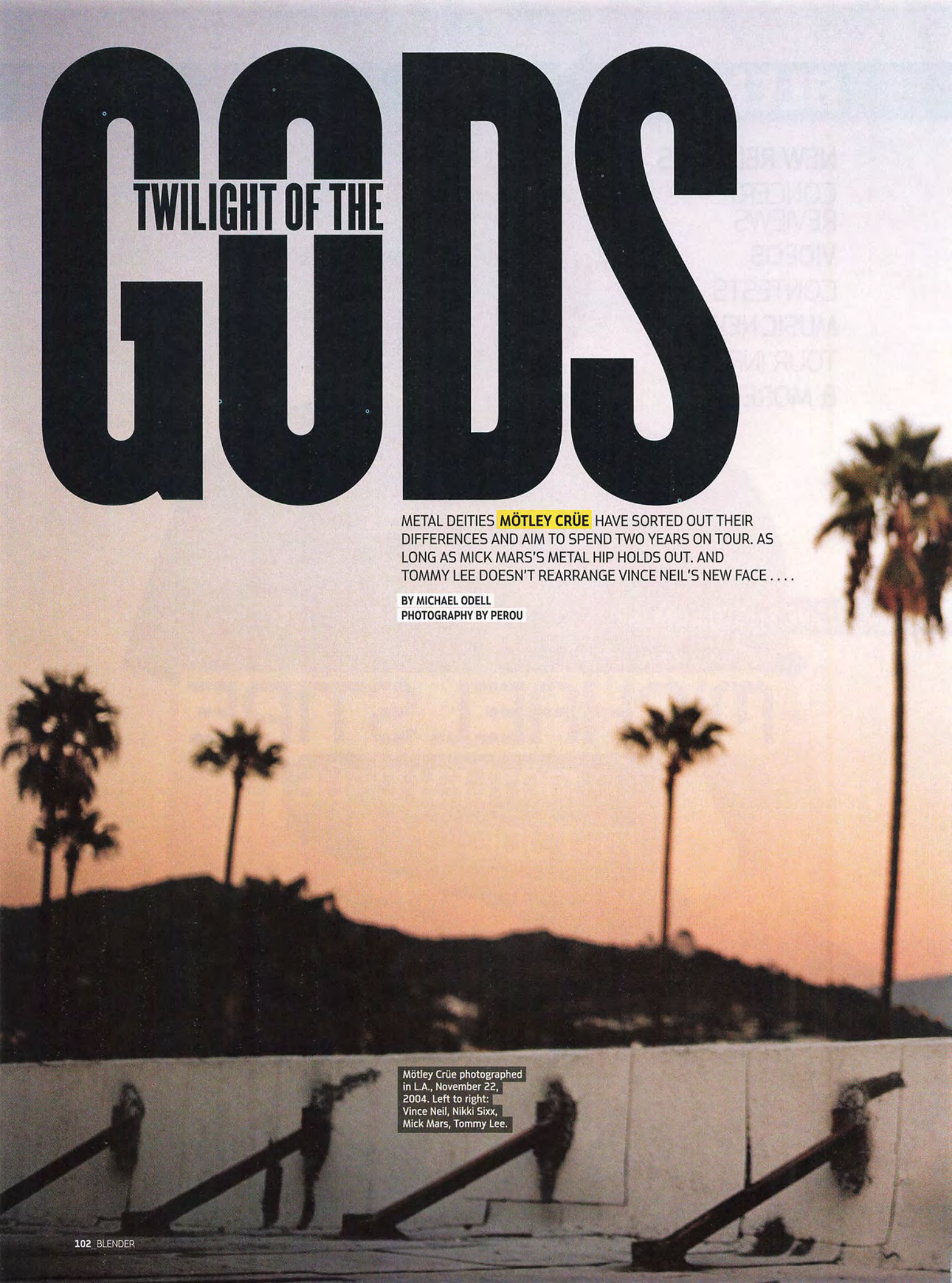
TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

METAL DEITIES **MÖTLEY CRÜE** HAVE SORTED OUT THEIR DIFFERENCES AND AIM TO SPEND TWO YEARS ON TOUR. AS LONG AS MICK MARS'S METAL HIP HOLDS OUT. AND TOMMY LEE DOESN'T REARRANGE VINCE NEIL'S NEW FACE . . . .

BY MICHAEL ODELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PEROU



Mötley Crüe photographed in L.A., November 22, 2004. Left to right: Vince Neil, Nikki Sixx, Mick Mars, Tommy Lee.

Grooming by Brenda Green for Margaretmaldonado.com; Styling by Marjan Malakpour for Margaretmaldonado.com

NIKKI SIXX'S JEANS BY **ROBERTO CAVALI.** MICK MARS'S SKULL NECKLACE FROM **LORDS**, L.A.; HAT BY **GOLDENGATE HAT CO.**, L.A. ALL OTHER CLOTHING THEIR OWN

TOMMY SEEMS TO be having a hard time understanding this, but we *will* tour, even if I have to get my fucking wife out there on drums," says Nikki Sixx, glowering darkly. Everyone checks his watch once more. But despite longing looks at the open doorway of the Hollywood photo studio, there is still no sign of a tall, swarthy, multiply-tattooed drummer with a world-renowned trouser bulge.

Mötley Crüe are supposed to have kissed, made up and readied themselves for a globe-trouncing comeback tour. Unfortunately, the depressing math is inescapable: After a five-hour wait, there are only three sulking rock legends on the sofa, not four.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

A FIGHT BETWEEN singer Vince Neil and Tommy Lee at a Las Vegas airport six years ago ended the last Mötley Crüe peace accord. Lee claimed Neil was being rude to the band's publicist. Neil didn't agree and pushed Lee to the floor.

But now — with a two-year world tour planned and new tracks for a greatest hits package, *Red White & Crüe*, recorded — they say their differences have been forgotten. Unfortunately, Tommy Lee seems to have also forgotten something else: the schedule. "Tommy's just not taking this band seriously," mutters bass player Sixx. "Oh, this is pretty unusual," sniffs Neil sarcastically — perhaps still smarting from Lee's comments in his autobiography, *Tommyland*, that one aspect of being in Mötley Crüe he did not miss was seeing Neil's "bloated, disrespectful ass" every day. Only the dignity and diplomacy of guitarist Mick Mars offer any hope: "People got lives to lead. Tommy's got a lot to deal with," he says reasonably. From a man battling the progressive spine-fusing disease ankylosing spondylitis — and who has only recently been able to walk again, following hip-replacement surgery — this seems little short of saintly.

Lee eventually breezes in at 6 P.M. He takes a tin of blue slime out of his knapsack, wipes it in his hair and says, "Let's do this." The rest of the Crüe amble up the stairs onto the studio roof, where their photo will be taken. No one says hello until they are standing shoulder to shoulder; then there are nods and smiles. Remarkably, Tommy offers a hand to Vince, which evolves into a back-slap. It looks like the reunion is on, after all.

Mötley Crüe have a special place in the canon of American metal: Their 40 million record sales weren't driven by a knack for stripper-friendly glam-rock hits alone. When they first got together as teenagers in L.A. in 1981, they saw the reign of REO Speedwagon, Styx and the Eagles as an affront to real rock values. Distilling the best of glam theatrics, punk and metal, they aimed to redress the balance with all the power chords, hairspray and anticlerical special effects they could muster. "I'm not claiming we split the fucking atom," says Sixx, "but 'Girls Girls Girls,' or maybe just seeing us chainsaw the head off a nun onstage, made you feel there was a 'them' and an 'us' again."

Off stage, that was certainly the case. The Crüe set themselves a rigorous lifestyle challenge: to get the coroner's pen as near to signing their death certificates as possible before sitting up and partying again. "It wasn't conscious," says Sixx. "That would be so lame. But you come after the Who, the Stones, the New York Dolls and Iggy — and there's a sense that 'We're going to go places no one has before.'"

Those "places" were vividly described in pointillist detail in the band's classic 2001 sex-and-drugs-and-more-sex-and-even-more-drugs tell-all tome, *The Dirt*. By airing their own soiled laundry, the Crüe cemented their place in rock history as a Sunset Strip Led Zeppelin minus the mystical woo-woo, and their utter shamelessness won them a legion of new fans starved for Homeric tales of rock debauchery. Now, amazingly, despite a combined life experience that includes overdose, manslaughter, rehab, jail, divorce, devil worship, child death, rape and degenerative illness, Mötley Crüe have largely taken up where they left off. Neil plays *Blender* a few freshly recorded tracks: "Liar," "Sick Love Song" and "If I Die Tomorrow." The new music from *Red White & Crüe* sounds unapologetically boisterous — a remarkable feat, given that the new songs were recorded tag-team style at Cello studios in L.A. so band members didn't have to be in the same room with one another.

"STEVEN TYLER SAID, 'YOU'RE GOING TO DIE.'"

But the will-they-won't-they reunion and this latest album — which follows two years' worth of compilations and box sets — is just the latest test endured by a group seemingly as addicted to celebrity as they once were to gobbling drugs. While Mick Mars and Nikki Sixx have remained relatively dignified since their 1998 split, Tommy Lee has become a celebrity wedding DJ, allowed his penis to co-narrate his autobiography and joined a college marching band for his NBC reality show; meanwhile, Vince Neil appeared in the first season of *The Surreal Life* (living with such Z-listers as Corey Feldman and Emmanuel Lewis) and recently underwent $80,000 worth of plastic surgery for *his* reality show. Good times. Neil, though, says that having fat sucked out of your face on national television is fun compared to the psychological torture of playing with certain ex-bandmates.

"There's been no reason to go through the brain damage of re-forming Mötley Crüe," says Neil. "It's not easy to be in Mötley Crüe."

So why reunite? For the same reason "best friends" from the Eagles to the Who board Gulfstreams together every couple of years: cash. Recently Nikki Sixx — very much the group's businessman — managed to win ownership of their master tapes from their record company, Elektra, in a deal the details of which are still covered by a nondisclosure agreement. And this litigation brought Crüe members first to the telephone and finally to the studio. "It got to the point where, without being a band, we're not potent," says Sixx. But last summer, when Sixx called Vince Neil and suggested the first meeting, Neil was hesitant. Mick Mars was too unwell to attend. Besides, Tommy would be there.

"It was kinda strained," says Neil. "I hadn't talked to Tommy Lee in years. Everyone was really guarded and had their managers there. It was very strange. Mick was home, I guess. Either there or the hospital."

Producer Bob Rock has known the band since recording the *Dr. Feelgood* album with them in 1989. Last year he was immortalized as the indulgent, mulleted patriarch helping Metallica survive band implosion in the film *Some Kind of Monster*. But he says Mötley Crüe are the ultimate challenge.

"With Metallica, I consider myself a fan and a friend." Says Rock. "[With Mötley Crüe] you got four L.A. badasses who used to drink a bottle of wine and want to kill each other. Of course there are issues. But I got them to play separately, so their minds were on work. As long as they're apart, they're still a great band."

These days, only Mars and Sixx still dress like glam-rocking ghouls — manicured beards, fat rings, pendants and boots. Neil opts for sports casual, while Lee — in shabby khaki pants and jacket — looks as if he'd gladly take $10 to check your oil and wipe your windshield. "It would be contrived to pretend we're

This page: Ross Halfin/Idols; Opposite: Ross Halfin/Idols

In the '80s: Now, *that's* a typing pool.

still 20," says 46-year-old Sixx. "The excitement of seeing this tour is like seeing Mike Tyson fight. He probably won't bite anyone's ear off — but you're there in case he does."

In the video for the new single, "If I Die Tomorrow," each member of the band gets to draw a line under his Mötley past by choosing his darkest hour and reliving it on film. There's Sixx overdosing on heroin; Neil killing his friend, Hanoi Rocks drummer Nicholas "Razzle" Dingley, in a drunk-driving smash in December 1984; Lee in prison for spousal assault on former wife Pamela Anderson in 1998; and then there's Mars's ongoing torment: He languishes on a hospital stretcher, close to death.

For Sixx, the video reminded him where his old life ended and the new one began. "I haven't touched heroin since 1988 — which is incredible to me, because I never believed I could live without it. When you're shitting and vomiting blood and you still want your fix, you know you're in serious trouble. At that time, [Aerosmith's] Steven Tyler tried to help me. He said 'Nikki, you're going to die. You must see it.' And I was like, 'What the fuck do you know?'"

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

WHEN VINCE NEIL, 43, answers the front door of his enormous, Spanish-style home in a gated community in Las Vegas — Andre Agassi and Denzel Washington are neighbors — he looks tanned and almost buff. Certainly there's no evidence of the "bloated, disrespectful ass" Tommy Lee describes with such feeling. But then again, as a result of VH1's new reality show, *Remaking: Vince Neil*, he has just had cheek implants, eyelid lifts and brow lifts done. "I didn't want the plastic surgery to make me look like Axl Rose — your face pulled up like this," he says. He's still wrenching his face upward to illustrate an inferior surgery outcome — an Axl-alike zombie — when fourth-wife-to-be Lia Girardini walks into the room to wrangle their crazy spaniels, Cakes and Crackers. "It's fucked up when you have to count, but yeah, Lia'll be number four. I got it right this time." Their January wedding will kick off a busy year for Neil. The rehab veteran — who was once fined $25,000 by his own band for breaking a no-alcohol-on-tour rule by drinking a cocktail — will soon inaugurate a range of fine wines from his own Napa Valley vineyard. Then he'll launch his own burger chain, Wild Side Cafe. And he's also a prime investor in the infamous anti-hangover pill RU-21. "Who better than me?" he laughs, downing a glass of white wine. "You take a pill between drinks and you don't feel like shit the next day."

But Neil is less gung ho about the Mötley Crüe reunion. He was quite happy touring with his own band, but Sixx convinced him the reunion was a good idea. It'll be a challenge. And never one to be unnecessarily diplomatic, Neil plans to release a solo single in direct competition to the Mötley Crüe one. "It's less in your face . . . more soulful," he says. "But don't tell them that."

Of everyone in the band, you and Tommy seem to have the most issues.

"Don't be polite. I don't like Tommy and Tommy doesn't like me."

Why not sit down and talk?

"Tommy doesn't want to resolve things. I don't care. I have no feelings about it either way. You go to work, and I bet there's a guy in the office you don't like. You still do your job, huh?"

Neil thinks band relations were first →

HAIR TODAY . . .

What happened to the careers — and the coiffures — of Mötley Crüe's metal contemporaries?

WARRANT

WHO? Pastry-loving hair-metal hit machine
BEST SONG: "Cherry Pie"
CAREER LOWLIGHT: In 1992, singer Jani Lane discovered that a framed poster of Warrant at their label's offices had been replaced by one of Alice in Chains. "That was when I saw the writing on the wall," he later said.
CURRENT HAIR STATUS: Lane's ex-wife Bobbie Brown has said he should consider joining the Hair Club for Men.

QUIET RIOT

WHO? Voluminously coiffed purveyors of 1983 No. 1 album *Metal Health*.
BEST SONG: "Cum On Feel the Noize"
CAREER LOWLIGHT: "Burned out" singer Kevin Dubrow in 1996 began hosting a Las Vegas radio show: "The money was shit — they started low and never went up."
CURRENT HAIR STATUS: A devotee of weaves, Dubrow's pate actually appears less shiny now than during the band's heyday.

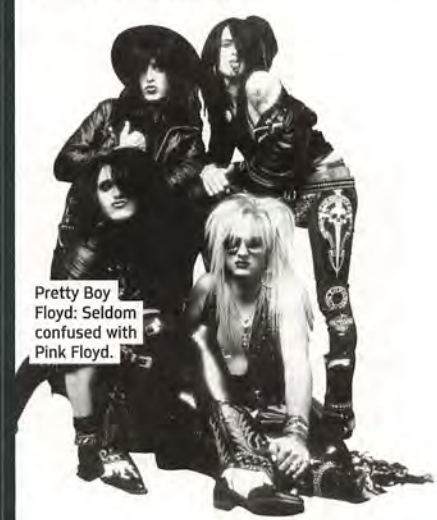
DOKKEN

WHO? Follically festooned quartet commanded by Don Dokken.
BEST SONG: "Kiss of Death"
CAREER LOWLIGHT: One review of their last album consisted largely of an imaginary exchange between Dokken and his toupee.
CURRENT HAIR STATUS: Don says he doesn't wear a piece. But he has 'fessed up to transplants. In 2000, he boasted, "my hair is 80 percent real these days."

PRETTY BOY FLOYD

WHO? Hair-metal latecomers fronted by Steve "Sex" Summers.
BEST SONG: "Toast of the Town"
CAREER LOWLIGHT: Summers now pays the bills running a strip bar in L.A.
CURRENT HAIR STATUS: The still lushly haired Summers claims to operate a "no wigs, no plugs" policy and says he has only ever worn a hair extension "on my penis."

Thanks to metalsludge.com


Pretty Boy Floyd: Seldom confused with Pink Floyd.

At annual de-lousing session in 1985.

seriously damaged when he went to jail after the 1984 car crash that killed Razzle. Neil served 30 days in jail in Torrance, California. But he was allowed beer, and visiting groupies could have sex with him.

"I wrote a $2.5 million check for vehicular manslaughter when Razzle died," he says. "I should have gone to prison. I definitely deserved to go to prison. But I did 30 days in jail and got laid and drank beer, because that's the power of cash. That's fucked up. It's changed now. But you're 20 years old and you've got a million dollars in your pocket and drugs and drink and women and fame and there are lawyers to protect you. We just thought we could do anything."

Tommy goes to college.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BOUNDING INTO L.A.'S Chop Shop studios, Tommy Lee, 42, couldn't be happier: He's just been kissing Pamela Anderson. Having hot-footed it from a parents evening at his son's school with his ex-wife, he chugs a beer and blurts with enthusiasm.

"You know what? You go through divorce and custody and then realize you have children, so you're stuck with each other for life. Pam and I, we hug, and our relationship is better than it's ever been." A scruffy, sunken-eyed bundle of energy, Lee is the unlikely cornerstone of an array of industries. In the studio, the reasons for his hesitation about the Mötley reunion are clear. Nickelback's Chad Kroeger is here, the latest in a line of visitors contributing to Lee's most recent solo album, which will also include Dave Navarro, Dave Grohl and Lenny Kravitz. Plus he's got his book, *Tommyland*, to promote, and then there's his NBC reality show, *Tommy Lee Goes to College*, in which the ironies of a well-endowed ex-felon rock drummer entering higher education are explored at the University of Nebraska. ("The tutor was hot," he says, "so I was kinda distracted.")

Tommy Lee — a drummer, for crying out loud — is still a celebrity. He makes out with Pink, he chats with Regis and Kelly, he has a Starbucks machine in his home. So does he really need a Mötley reunion? "A part of me is like, 'Why?' We fucking kicked ass and sold 40 million records. We did it. What else is there to do? But as you go around doing book signings, people ask, 'Why don't you play one more time?' So, fuck it — we are."

← The Crüe recall number of own weddings they can't remember attending at December 2004 press conference.

Things are better between Lee and Neil now. Neil's being quite respectful. And yesterday's hug on the rooftop was nice. "Maybe he realizes he's been a bit of a fucking asshole," says Tommy. "He hasn't treated us so fairly. Maybe he's read my book. All I know from this last week is that things are different."

The sad part is, he says, people forget that it was he who recruited Neil to Mötley Crüe in the first place. Back then, in high-school, they were buddies who were going to form a band and "fuck the world up its ass." "He was a good-looking dude who could sing amazing Cheap Trick covers, and so I took him to Nikki and said, 'He's our frontman.'"

"I DEFINITELY DESERVED TO GO TO PRISON."

But Lee feels betrayed. For example, when they both fell off the wagon while on a Crüe tour in Hawaii in 1999, Lee owned up to the band, but Neil let him squirm alone. "He fucking left me high and dry, the fucker." And he says that kind of thing happened over and over again. "And then you think, 'This guy has no love for me — why would I want to play music with him?'" Back in October 2003, Sammy Hagar tried to get Mötley Crüe to re-form for a jam at Tommy's birthday party. All of the band agreed, except one. "It woulda happened but . . ." Lee trails off with theatrical sadness. "I heard that Vince wanted to get paid."

Of this Lee is now sure: If Vince is disrespectful, he'll walk in a minute. But there will be no violence. He's never going back to jail. He was charged with spousal assault on Pamela Anderson after he lost his temper trying to find a frying pan in the kitchen, and spent four months in jail. It changed him. He didn't get burgers or groupies. He got 300-lb. gangbangers wanting to kick his ass. "My anger-management classes have taught me there's always a way out. I don't like to make too much of a big deal about this because it sounds gay, but if I feel angry, I like to go for a walk and look at trees."

"Tommy's the big question," sighs Bob Rock. "I've sat down and explained to him that, besides a sex tape, he has still to surpass being the drummer in Mötley Crüe. He wants to erase his past. But he should embrace it. I've told him they have new songs to be proud of. But still . . . he's the one you worry won't show up."

What if I said I'm going to bet my granny's life savings on your finishing the Mötley Crüe tour?

"Oh fuck, dude, I dunno. I just don't know. It's tough. OK, maybe half."

Back in L.A., an army of smart people with cellphones and laptops are planning the Mötley assault. When rehearsal dates are raised, everyone looks at Tommy. He doesn't seem to be writing them down. And there are other hurdles too. Like Mick Mars's onstage mobility.

This tour is important to Mars. It

Clockwise from top: Mick Rock/Star File; Annamaria DiSanto/Wirelmage.com; NBC

might be his last one. "It's what I've been working towards for three years," he says. "Time is precious, and I've learned to appreciate everything I've got left." Mars is a shrunken, stooping figure with a marionette walk that makes him seem much older than his 48 years. Today his doctor has visited to congratulate him on his latest progress: faltering steps across a room. A week ago he couldn't walk unaided at all. Six months ago he almost died. "I was really ill then," he says. "The doctor gave me two days to live." That was due to a bout of pneumonia followed by an infection caused by mold growing in his house. Mars's condition is treatable, but incurable. Ankylosing spondylitis is a progressive disorder of the joints that spreads from the hips up the spine. From the middle of his back to his brain stem he's in constant pain. "It hasn't touched my hands, and I give thanks for that. Playing guitar in a rock band is what I chose to do with my life, and that hasn't been taken away from me yet."

"Mick never wanted money or a clothing line or a solo deal or to race cars," says Bob Rock. "He just wanted to play guitar in Mötley Crüe. When they split it was a huge loss to him. Seeing him back onstage will be truly awesome."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

NO ONE IN the band wants to go back to the bad old days of drug testing and $25,000 fines for drinking a cocktail. No one envisions roadies jerking off into their own hands while groupies dressed as cats lick it up. "Did that happen?" asks Mars. "I think," says Sixx, "it did."

And, to enhance the prospects of finishing this time, each member of the band will have his own tour bus. "Mine will be a 16-wheeled hospital," smiles Mars. "Mine will be a recording studio," says Sixx, who will write a new album on the road. "I'm old school. I want a fucking brass pole right in the middle of my king-sized bed in the back," says Neil — despite his plans to marry on January 9.

And Tommy Lee? He doesn't know what his bus will be like yet. "Long as he fucking gets on one," growls Nikki Sixx. Patient, committed and mature, Sixx has mastered the nonconfrontational management-speak that may yet see Mötley Crüe through their first successful tour in seven years. "The secret is to focus on the process, to be in the present and not to try and force the better outcome," he says, jiggling his ringed hands in a new-agey way. Vince Neil has a much more simple strategy: "The secret is to think of the Eagles. They toured forever," he says. "And they fucking hated each other's guts." [BLENDER]

From top: Ross Halfin/Idols; No credit; Stephen Wayda/Corbis Outline; Neal Preston/Corbis

CRÜE BY THE NUMBERS

THE MÖTLEY MATH

Cost of recording debut album, **TOO FAST FOR LOVE**, 1982: **$7,000**

Cost of recording third album, **THEATRE OF PAIN**, 1985: **$200,000**

Nikki Sixx's monthly **DRUG BUDGET**, 1985: **$140,000**

Number of times the Crüe's best-selling album, 1989's **DR. FEELGOOD**, has gone platinum: **6**

ADVANCE received upon renewing Elektra records deal, 1991: **$25 MILLION**

Number of **TOP 40 SINGLES** recorded prior to renewing Elektra deal: **7**

Number of **TOP 40 HIT SINGLES** recorded subsequent to renewing Elektra deal: **0**

Attempts by Nikki Sixx **TO SLEEP WITH** Tommy Lee's mother: **1**

Band members who have starred in commercially available **PORNOGRAPHIC VIDEOS**: **2**

Band members who have been **PRONOUNCED DEAD**: **1**

Band members who dated and/or married **PAMELA ANDERSON**: **2**

Band members who married a presenter on Comedy Central's **BATTLEBOTS**: **2**

JAIL SENTENCE, in months, handed to Tommy Lee for attacking Pamela Anderson: **6**

Jail sentence, in days, handed to Vince Neil for killing Nick "Razzle" Dingley of Hanoi Rocks by **VEHICULAR MANSLAUGHTER**: **30**

Miles per hour a **NAKED AND COKED-UP** Nikki Sixx's Porsche was travelling when he hit a telephone pole in 1983: **90**

Number of hollow-point bullets loaded into a **SEMIAUTOMATIC PISTOL** Tommy Lee unsuccessfully attempted to board a plane with at Los Angeles International airport in 1994: **10**

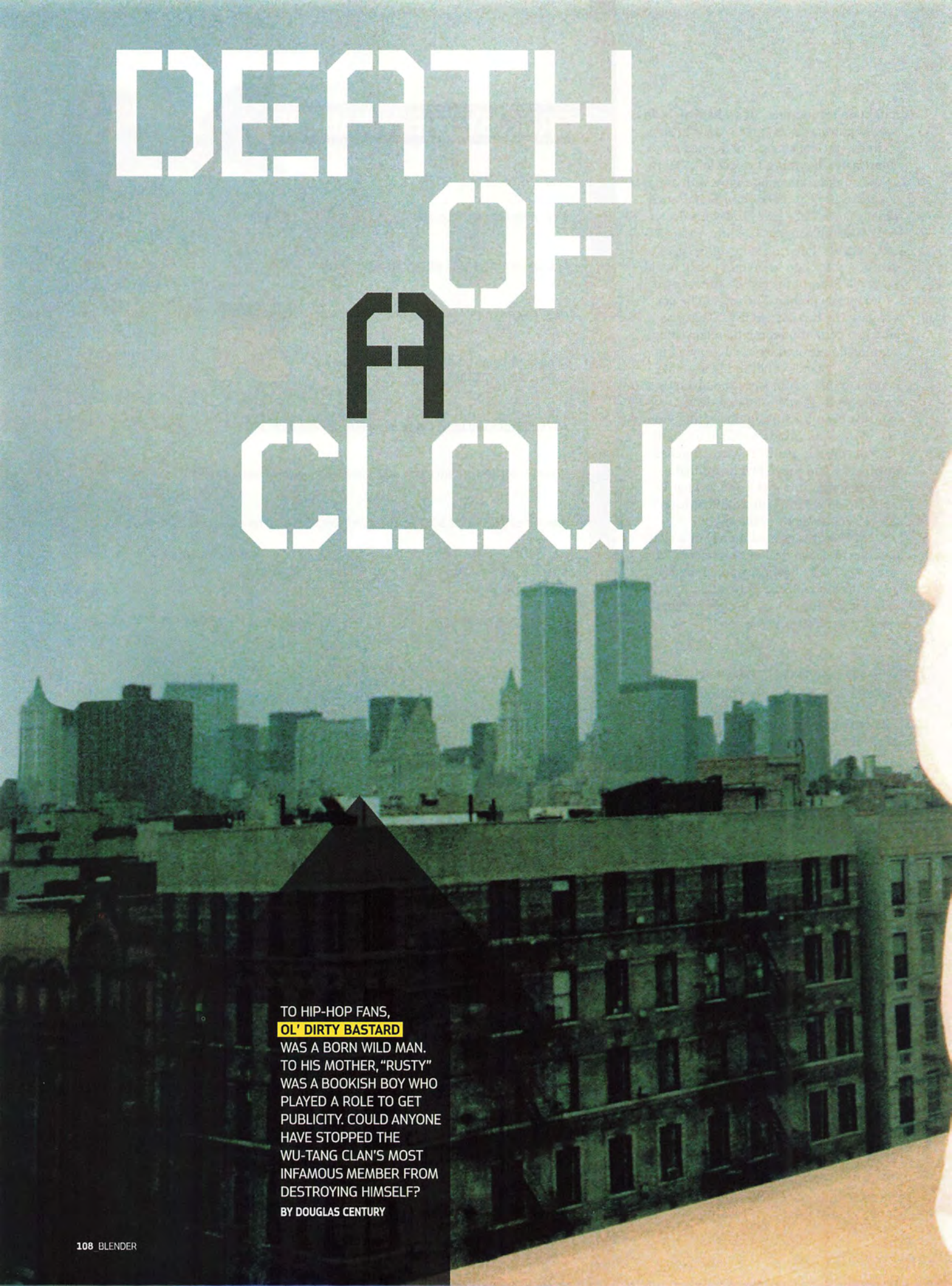
STRIP CLUBS paid tribute to in "Girls, Girls, Girls": **7**

Total number of Mötley Crüe **EX-WIVES**: **9**

On a scale of 1 to 10, how **ANNOYED** temporary replacement singer John Corabi was when the title of album *Till Death Do Us Part* was changed to *Mötley Crüe* after he'd had it tattooed on his leg: **10**

BEN MITCHELL

DEATH OF A CLOWN



TO HIP-HOP FANS, **OL' DIRTY BASTARD** WAS A BORN WILD MAN. TO HIS MOTHER, "RUSTY" WAS A BOOKISH BOY WHO PLAYED A ROLE TO GET PUBLICITY. COULD ANYONE HAVE STOPPED THE WU-TANG CLAN'S MOST INFAMOUS MEMBER FROM DESTROYING HIMSELF?

BY DOUGLAS CENTURY

Eric Monroe/Retna Ltd.

Ol' Dirty Bastard, New York City, 1994.

A FEW DAYS BEFORE HIS SUDDEN DEATH last November, Russell Jones — known to the world as Ol' Dirty Bastard but to his family as Rusty — was packing his bag in his mother's Brooklyn apartment, en route to a show in Colorado, when he had a premonition that he would not live to see his 36th birthday. "Rusty left Wednesday on the trip, and he told me he was never coming back," recalls ODB's mother, Cherry Jones. "He said, 'This is the last time you're going to see me.' I said, 'Wherever you go, make sure you call me and let me know you're okay.'"

ODB did return from his November 11 show in Fort Collins, Colorado. But his parting words to his mother — a devout Christian who once worked as an NYPD emergency dispatcher and a corrections officer at Bedford Hills prison, and the woman who had power of attorney over the course of ODB's 12-year musical career — were to prove prophetic.

Three days later, hours after returning on a 10:30 P.M. flight from Denver, ODB was sitting in the lounge of the Wu-Tang Clan's studio, 36 Records LLC, on West 34th Street in Manhattan. He began complaining of chest pains and having difficulty breathing, and then suddenly collapsed — apparently suffering a heart attack. Paramedics were unable to resuscitate him; he was pronounced dead shortly after 5 P.M., Saturday, November 13. He would have turned 36 just two days later. The official autopsy — which came a month later — concluded that ODB's death had been caused by an accidental overdose: the combined effects of cocaine and the powerful prescription painkiller Tramadol.

Yet even before the cause of death was determined, those closest to the multiple-aliased rapper — he recorded as Ol' Dirty Bastard, Ason Unique, Osirus, Dirt McGirt and Big Baby Jesus — were already acknowledging that it was years of dedicating himself to a pitiless rock & roll lifestyle that had finally killed him.

During a eulogy at the massive funeral held in the rapper's native Brooklyn, Dirty's first cousin and co-founder of the Wu-Tang Clan, the RZA, said, "The abuse of alcohol, drugs and sex will take any one of us outta here."

Thousands of mourners filled the Christian Cultural Center — ranging from rank-and-file hip-hop fans in bubble goose jackets to members of the Wu-Tang Clan in ankle-length fur coats and Mariah Carey in black haute couture. They were all visibly stunned at seeing hip-hop's most flamboyant character lying at the front of the church in an open casket, his beard neatly trimmed by a mortician's hand, his body buttoned up in an elegant white suit.

For many years, the Wu-Tang Clan's clowning trickster had seemed to be practically indestructible. He had survived point-blank gunshot wounds from a .45 and a .357 Magnum, had dozens of brushes with police and then made it through two years of hard time in New York's most infamous maximum-security prison — and still somehow managed to become one of the most engaging and comedic rap voices of his generation. The fact that his post-prison career was on the rise — while still on parole, Dirty signed a high-profile solo deal with Roc-A-Fella and had been followed round the clock by a camera crew for a Spike TV reality series — only masked the gradual decline of rap's gold-toothed court jester.

FOR YEARS, ODB HAD SEEMED TO BE INDESTRUCTIBLE.

"This brother don't have to go through no more hell," said the spiritual godfather and elder statesman of the Wu-Tang collective, Popa Wu, also known as Freedom Allah. "He don't have to suffer no more."

Leading artists and producers who'd worked with ODB over the years said that his status as hip-hop's patron saint of the outrageous was assured. "There's not been a hip-hop artist to do the most extreme kind of craziness that he did," says DJ Premier of Gangstarr, who produced one of the tracks on the posthumously released *Osirus: The Official Mixtape album.*

Damon Dash, who signed Ol' Dirty Bastard to Roc-A-Fella in 2003, just after ODB was released from a two-year prison term spent largely in New York State's infamous Clinton Correctional Facility, says he was staggered by the sudden death of his eclectic star. "It's real tragic what happed with Ol' Dirty Bastard and the possibilities of what we were gonna do together at the Roc," says Dash, who planned to release a posthumous ODB CD in February on his newly formed Roc-for-Life Records.

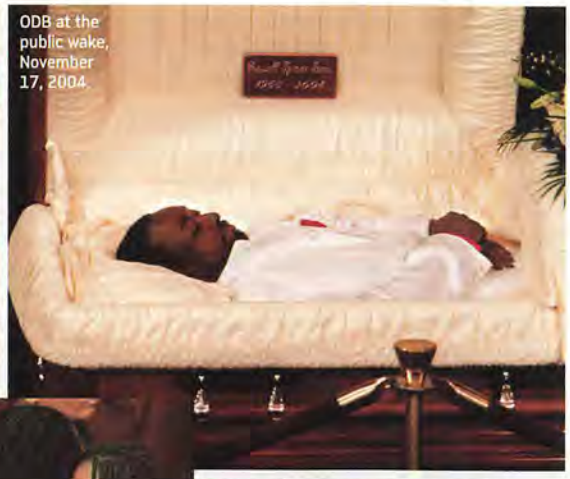
Even before Dirty's death, some hip-hop observers were deriding Dash and others for a P.T. Barnum–like exploitation of a vulnerable man who might have been helped by some time out of the limelight. The Spike TV reality show, *Stuck on Dirty*, in which contestants were electronically tethered to the parolee for five straight days, struck many of ODB's friends as particularly tasteless.

"They got a camera strapped to him like 'On Parole With Ol' Dirty.' That's stupidness," Wu rapper Inspectah Deck groused last year. "Ain't nobody really saying, 'Nah, Dirt, don't do that, man. That's bad for your image.' You

"Rusty" Jones at age 7, from his father's photo album.

Sangjib Min/Daily Press Photo

Three of ODB's seven children: Left to right, Shaquita, 13, Taniqua, 16, and Bar-son, 15.


ODB at the public wake, November 17, 2004.

←ODB's wife, Icelene Jones, at the funeral.

coming out of jail. You should just lay low and spend time with your family."

"As long as you let him be him, he was all right," observed Popa Wu. "But when you tried to change him and make him be something other than himself, he went through his little turmoil. That's what put him through changes, because he felt he had to please everybody, and Dirty never really actually tried to please himself. He felt he owed everybody something."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

RUSSELL TYRONE Jones was born November 15, 1968, in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. He was a child of the housing projects, living at 296 Sutter Avenue and later in Linden Plaza near the Brooklyn-Queens border, but in many ways the Jones household defied the easy stereotypes of inner-city struggle. It was a close-knit family with two gainfully employed parents. Cherry Jones was working at One Police Plaza as an emergency dispatcher and Russell's father, William, worked for the Housing Authority.

Dirty later self-mythologized his past as having been one of welfare and deprivation, much to his parents' chagrin. But Cherry Jones paints a portrait of her son as a sensitive, good-humored, bookish boy who never missed a meal in his youth. "He was the family clown," she says. "But Rusty was also very intelligent. He was reading on a twelfth-grade level in the sixth grade. His nose was always in a book: He loved science and astronomy. When he was 9, he told me he would never work for anybody. He'd work, but he'd be working for himself."

At ODB's wake in Brooklyn, sitting in the coffee shop of the Christian Cultural Center in Canarsie, a cousin named Cita recalled summer barbecues at William and Cherry's home that inevitably turned into impromptu jam sessions. "Rusty was always getting on the mic, making everyone laugh," Cita said. "He was always in the middle of everything."

Contrary to ODB's image as a natural-born troublemaker, many of his closest friends and family members recall a man who, even in the wildest years of his fame, always retained the generosity and thoughtfulness of his boyhood persona. His Wu-Tang brethren recall many times when Dirty would stop the car on an inner-city block and pass out dollar bills to the swarming kids, telling them to run to the store and buy themselves some candy. A serious habit for Now and Laters was yet another on his list of addictions. "My father was like a big kid," says his daughter Taniqua Jones. "He always ate candy; that's why his teeth look the way they look now."

When Rusty was 11 or 12, his mother noticed a change in his reading habits. He went from astronomy to devouring the lessons of the Nation of Gods and Earths — an offshoot of the Nation of Islam known as the Five Percenters.

Rusty Jones's entry into the Nation marked the beginning of what would later become the Wu-Tang Clan. His cousin Robert Diggs, later professionally known as the RZA, was Rusty's "enlightener," who brought him into the group and converted him to the Five Percenter beliefs. "He chose the name Ason Unique," he says, "'a son who is unique.'"

The teenage Ason Unique was the polar opposite of the often buffoonish and self-destructive character known as Ol' Dirty Bastard. The surviving members of the Wu-Tang clan remember Ason Unique as a paragon of discipline and respect. He didn't eat meat, wore immaculately pressed designer clothes, and was →

WHO'S YOUR DADDY?

YOU BASTARDS!

ODB isn't the only celebrity who's fathered children with women he somehow forgot to marry . . . .

SHAWN KEMP

You could throw a rock in any NBA dressing room and probably hit a seven-footer currently being sued for paternity. But in 1998 it was revealed that six-time all-star Kemp had sired seven children with six women. That's nearly a double-double! As one Florida journalist later noted when Kemp joined the Orlando Magic, "if he brings all his illegitimate children to games, at least there shouldn't be any empty seats."

DEADBEAT DAD RATING:

POPE ALEXANDER VI

The 15th-century pontiff proved it is, indeed, good to be the Pope by having seven kids out of wedlock. His many lovers included a 16-year-old girl named Giulia Farnese, whom he had painted as the Virgin Mary. Who says Popes have no sense of humor?

DEADBEAT DAD RATING:

MICK JAGGER

Ol' Floppy Lips's failure to keep it zipped has resulted in a few paternity suits: first by actress Marsha Hunt in the '70s and more recently by Brazilian model Luciana Morad. Sir Mick also had two children with model — sorry, supermodel — Jerry Hall before he married her. Meanwhile, Stones guitarist Brian Jones fathered at least four illegitimate children before he died at age 27.

DEADBEAT DAD RATING:

SCREAMIN' JAY HAWKINS

Easily responsible for more bastards than all the Stones combined, he claimed to have caused the pitter-patter of 57 tiny pairs of feet. In fact the '50s R&B screamer is thought to have fathered up to 75 kids, nearly all of them illegitimate. Anyone who thinks they look more like Screamin' Jay than the man they call "daddy" should contact www.citynetmedia.com/client/jayskids.

DEADBEAT DAD RATING:

Luciana Morad with Mick's son Lucas.

Top, clockwise from top left: Splash News; Bebeto Matthews/AP Wide World; David Karp/AP Wide World; Bottom: Splash News

respected by other members of the Five Percenter group for his philosophical outlook. "Every time he spoke," remembers the RZA, "he spoke with wisdom."

Glimpses of this fearless persona were still in evidence in the early days of the Wu-Tang Clan. The RZA recalls one of the group's early performances, on *The Arsenio Hall Show* in 1994. "ODB gets on TV and yells out in front of millions of viewers, 'The black man is God!' It takes a lot of bravery, a lot of strong will, strong spirit and freedom to say that."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BUT THE COUSIN who "enlightened" him and helped him make his fortune by bringing him into the Staten Island–based collective that resurrected East Coast hip-hop in the mid-1990s was also responsible for providing Rusty Jones with the alter ego that destroyed him. When the Wu-Tang Clan were developing their stage personas, it was the RZA who came up with the name Ol' Dirty Bastard. "There ain't no father to his style," as Method Man famously declared on the Clan's debut, *Enter the Wu-Tang*. Today, the RZA regrets settling on the name for his yowling, bug-eyed cousin. During his eulogy at ODB's funeral, RZA surprised many in the crowd by apologizing for it.

"The name is a word, but it becomes flesh when you keep repeating it or you keep living it," he said later to *Blender*. "It winds up becoming you. And that's what happened to him. As more people called him Ol' Dirty Bastard and recognized him as ODB — that persona, that energy — he became an Ol' Dirty Bastard. He was a very benevolent guy and very gracious to a lot of people. But at the same time he was a bastard to others."

Sometimes the ODB routine could be hilarious. In 1994, when *MTV News* spent the day with him, the highlight of the trip was the rapper's arrival at a New York welfare office — in a limousine, with several of his children in tow — to collect food stamps. "It's free money," ODB said into the camera without missing a beat. "Why wouldn't you want to get free money?"

But at other times the act was simply incomprehensible. Mainstream America first saw this side of Dirty when he bum-rushed the stage of the 1998 Grammy Awards, interrupting Shawn Colvin's acceptance speech to complain that the Wu-Tang Clan had lost to P. Diddy in a different category, and announcing, "Wu-Tang are for the children!" ("Something just jumped into my blood," he explained afterwards.)

His mother thinks that this side of ODB was merely a carefully cultivated gimmick — she says that Dirty could always drop the wild-man act when he came home to her kitchen table in Brooklyn. "It was all a stage thing," Cherry Jones says. "It was a show, for publicity. He always said, 'Ma, there's no such thing as bad publicity.'"

But others see the unfettered frenzy as the true essence of the man, as well as an embodiment of the best of hip-hop. "I've seen Dirty go to shows and take the mic and dare the artist to take the mic away, because he'd flip out on them," recalls DJ Premier. "It was always a thrill,

Leaving Manhattan Psychiatric Center, May 2003.

like, 'Uh-oh, Dirty's here, you know he gon' go on stage and fuck with whoever's holdin' it down.' If they could hold it down, he'd give them their respect. If not, it's his show until he done with the mic."

But offstage, too, ODB became wilder and wilder — drinking prodigiously, snorting coke and smoking grass and crack. And he had obviously never read the Surgeon General's memo about the risks of unprotected sex.

"We in Ohio, maybe 1991," the RZA recalls. "And we're seeing who could fuck the most bitches in one month. Basically fucking a bitch a day, sometimes two. He caught some shit; I guess he caught gonorrhea. With a burnt dick, he shoulda been chillin'. No, he tied a napkin around his dick — a rubber band around a rag — and went up inside a bitch. That's how wild he was when it came to sex."

DIRTY ALWAYS DROPPED THE WILD-MAN ACT AT HOME.

And even as he was burgeoning into an accomplished solo artist, releasing hits like "Shimmy Shimmy Ya" and tearing up guest spots with the likes of Mariah Carey ("Me and Mariah/Go back like babies and pacifiers," he rapped memorably on 1995's "Fantasy"), the ODB lifestyle was overtaking him.

He was convicted of second-degree assault in New York in 1993, and was mysteriously shot in the stomach by another rapper in Brooklyn in 1994. In 1997 he was arrested for failing to pay nearly a year's worth of child support for three children he had with his wife, Icelene. After the court ordered him to pay her $35,000, ODB defended himself as a "family man" on MTV.

His life was in freefall — and yet many friends and associates found his antics amusing, if not endearing. David Lotwin, who co-owned New York's underground D&D Studios, where Dirty sometimes recorded, fondly remembers an unlikely meeting with ODB.

"It's 2:30 on a weekday and I'm walking through the lady's fragrance section of Macy's," Lotwin says with a smile. "There's Dirty, standing right there in the middle, like a sore thumb. He's pretty loud, got the gold teeth flashing, the whole nine yards. I was like, 'Yo, what are you doing here, man?' Dirty says, 'Look around you, brother. The bitches! Can you do better than this?' And then he walked off, chasing after some girl."

In one of the eulogies at the Brooklyn funeral, Popa Wu reflected on ODB's shaggy impulsiveness. "Dirty never did nothin' to harm nobody in this world," he said. "Everything he did was harming him. He never hurt nobody."

But that wasn't entirely true: In 1998, ODB pleaded guilty to attempted assault on Icelene, and then two months later was shot in the back during what he said was a robbery of his Brooklyn home. Days later he was accused of shoplifting a $50 pair of Nike sneakers in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and, while scuffling with a security guard at the House of Blues in Los Angeles, was charged with making "terrorist threats." In 1999, while being cited for a parking violation in Los Angeles, he became one of the first citizens arrested under a new California law that made wearing a bulletproof vest illegal for convicted felons. Two months later, he was picked up in Queens, New York, for running a red light and was arrested when police found twenty vials of crack and a small amount of marijuana in his Mercedes-Benz.

He was sentenced to three years' probation and one year in a residential drug-rehab facility in Pasadena, California. Ten months later, after a disagreement with

Tim Soter/Retna Ltd.

↑ The Wu-Tang Clan in 1998, with the RZA (in yellow) and ODB (center front).

Making a video with Busta Rhymes (right), 1996.

Being arrested after a shootout with police, 1999.

the staff, he walked out of rehab and became a fugitive — arrested in a McDonald's parking lot in Philadelphia by two female police officers who recognized him because they were fans. ODB was sentenced to two to four years behind bars.

According to his mother and the surviving members of the Wu-Tang Clan, prison marked the beginning of the end of the man they had known. "He was never himself after that," Cherry Jones says. "Being locked down changed him."

The RZA made numerous visits to his cousin while ODB was serving time in Downstate Correctional Facility — and heavily medicated with a cocktail of psychiatric drugs. RZA was shocked by the transformation."He looked like Sasquatch! You understand?" he says, "Ason Unique weighs about 160 lbs., a Polo-wearing, Gucci-shoe, fly-ass motherfucker. When I went to see him, he was a 220-lb. Sasquatch, breathing heavy. His hair was gray. I was like, 'Yo, what the fuck are they doing to you in here? You ODB, nigga! Run this muthafuckin' jail!'"

At one point during his imprisonment, his leg was broken, and Dirty intimated that corrections officers were plotting to kill him.

"It's not easy for me," ODB said during a rare prison interview with *Blender* while he was incarcerated in Clinton in 2002. "I feel like I'm in a spaceship that has just landed here. And when you get out, you realize there's nothin' there at all. You know, I don't even know if Ol' Dirty Bastard is here anymore."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

EVEN IN PRISON, ODB's family members say, he harbored dreams of rebuilding a stable, domestic life. "He always told us how, when he got out of prison, me and my mother, brother and sister were going to live on a big ship and travel all around the world and have a lot of animals, like Noah's Ark," says his daughter Taniqua.

Upon his release from prison, Dirty slimmed down and seemed to have resumed his performing career with a new vigor and focus. He was in the process of negotiating a label deal for his group, Brooklyn Zu, shopping his own hip-hop clothing line, and contributing to the recent Wu-Tang concert album, *Disciples of the 36 Chambers: Chapter 1*. Those who worked with him in his final year say he was surprisingly clear-headed — at least professionally.

"At the end of his life, he was very focused on his career, starting to take matters into his own hands," says Damon Dash. "He was coming out and taking meetings himself. His work ethic was better than I had anticipated. Everyone else was anticipating Dirty to be difficult. But he really showed up every time we needed him. He did make a lot of records — a lot of good records."

But since his death, ODB has been dogged by as much controversy as he was in life. Even before his funeral, Icelene Jones filed suit to gain control of her late husband's estate. In December 2004 a Surrogate Court granted her control of the estate, a fact that has rankled many of the deceased rapper's friends and associates. Until his death, Cherry Jones had made every legal decision of her son's career — even signing the Roc-A-Fella Records contract for him.

Complicating matters further, Icelene proceeded with an immediate cremation of her husband's corpse, sparking speculation that she was trying to preclude the possibility of any future DNA tests aimed at proving paternity claims. And while Cherry Jones and ODB's manager Jared Weisfeld have set up their own label and plan to use the proceeds of their records to provide college tuition for all of ODB's seven children, the RZA fears that, even in death, ODB will end up being exploited. "That's the problem, I think: People wanna use this to get rich, or use this to enjoy more than what they need. And that shouldn't be the goal. The goal should be to be able to take his life, that's gone from this earth, take his legacy and maintain what he left behind."

As for the cocktail of legal and illicit drugs that killed him, the conditions of his parole included mandatory drug counseling, but the RZA believes that Ol' Dirty Bastard had problems that were more deep-rooted than mere substance abuse.

"He was the true expression of the word 'freedom,' because there was nothing that controlled him," he says. "Martin Luther King said, 'Freedom operates under a law of justice.' Freedom has boundaries to it. But Dirty had no boundaries, no boundaries at all. He was the true expression of freedom." [BLENDER]

Clockwise from top left: Bob Berg/Retna Ltd.; Jay Blakesberg/Retna Ltd.; Moises Saman/AP Wide World

SPEND OUR CASH!

"WE'RE GONNA GET DRUNK AND WATCH PEOPLE FALL"

HONKY-TONK HIPSTERS KINGS OF LEON HAVE TWO PROBLEMS: THEY'RE SOBER AND "HORNY." SO IT'S *BLENDER* TO THE RESCUE, BANKROLLING A NIGHT OF BOOZE — AND ROLLER-GIRLS!

BY JONAH WEINER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY EMILY SHUR

Left to right: Matt, Jared, Caleb and Nate Followill.

"I WANT A roller-skating girlfriend!" announces Kings of Leon singer Caleb Followill, working on his second glass of white wine in a Nashville bar and grill. "We're tired of sitting around staring at each other. We need women."

It's 5:30 P.M. and *Blender* is sitting at a table stacked high with ravaged plates. Composed of brothers Caleb, Nathan and Jared and self-effacing cousin Matthew, this hipster Partridge Family have been eating like pigs. Then again, the stomach-fortifying is well-needed. Armed with $848 of *Blender*'s cash, the Followill boys have decided to stock up on top-shelf liquor, tailgate in a parking lot with 30-odd of their very odd friends and then throw a roller-skating party. Or, as bassist Jared puts it, "We're gonna get drunk and watch people fall!"

"We didn't have much time to roller-skate as kids," drummer Nate says. Sons of a traveling Pentecostal preacher, the boys were hustled from town to town. "There was one year we got to make friends, when we settled down and went to one school," Nate adds. For the Kings, tonight is a way to revisit that wonder year. "I dated the richest girl in town, and her parents owned a roller-skating rink," Caleb recalls.

After two months touring Europe, the band is glad to be back home. Chart-topping celebrities in the U.K., they're relieved to be able to walk down the street without a security escort. "It's hard not to get depressed on tour — you're either working, or you're working on your buzz," Caleb explains. Jared agrees: "You snap really easily." This sense of frustration pervades their second album, *Aha Shake Heartbreak*, a set of blues-rock and Southern boogie executed with cosmopolitan cool. "It's a really personal album," says Caleb. "The press talks about how I went to bed with a supermodel? Well, I wrote a song about how I couldn't get it up with her."

$848 CHALLENGE!

THE BAND
KINGS OF LEON

THE MISSION
TO SPEND $848 IN ONE DAY ANY WAY THEY WANT

THE REASON
BLENDER ASKED THEM TO!

"So this is what Donald Trump's ass smells like."

"Do you have change for a booger?"

Spells of impotence aside, the Kings don't mind that their concerts often play like Fashion Week afterparties — Kate Moss, Liv Tyler and Frankie Rayder are among their fans. "It's nice to walk back to your room with a good-looking girl," drummer Nate notes. "Or an ugly girl. Or if you're doing well, both."

Nashville bars run more on Alan Jackson tribute acts than *Vogue* cover stars, though, and the Kings are clearly in withdrawal from their seven-week diet of catwalk beauties. Which leads to the second reason behind the roller-skating idea. "I'm horny as hell," Caleb confesses. "We do have the world's largest porn store in Nashville," Jared offers. "There's 50 peeping rooms, and they've got everything: grandmas, midgets on bicycles . . . ."

The first stop of the night is a local liquor emporium. Little did *Blender* know, however, that we're traveling with a bunch of oenophiles. "I'd love a 2001 Chablis Premier Cru," Nate proclaims. "On tour, we have wine-offs," Caleb says. "Everyone brings a different bottle, we drink them all and whoever brought the best buys the next one. We've spent about 4,300 euros [$5,700] in one night."

Sadly, since half of tonight's entertainment allowance will go to renting out the rink, Premier Cru isn't in the cards. "This'll do!" Jared yells, hoisting a jumbo-sized silo of Grey Goose roughly the circumference of his string-bean torso. "Now let's get some Captain Morgan for the girls."

Thirty minutes and $407 later, we leave the booze store with enough hooch to resurrect Jim Morrison, John Bonham and Keith Moon, then kill them all over again. Matt surveys the three packed cardboard boxes. "We should get some beer," he decides.

At 7 P.M., we pull into the parking lot of the Skate Center, barren save for a few cars belonging to the staff. The Kings have spent the past few days inviting friends but, at start time, none have arrived. "This looks great," Jared deadpans. "We've got enough alcohol for a small wedding," Matt observes. "We're trying to perfect a drinking problem," Nate shrugs, a half-empty bottle of chardonnay in hand. "It takes practice."

Surely, *Blender* asks, their God-fearing father would frown on this sort of debauchery? "If our dad was here tonight, he'd be the one roller-skating in his underwear," Nate says. Later on, we learn that the senior Followill was defrocked a few years ago for "infractions" and has enjoyed several DUI arrests since.

"THEY'VE GOT EVERYTHING: GRANDMAS, MIDGETS ON BICYCLES . . ."

An hour later, our tailgate is holding steady at an underwhelming 12. "We should've paid bums to show up," Jared observes. "Twenty dollars extra to fight."

Thankfully, his girlfriend soon arrives. She's first in a small caravan of beat-up compacts that unloads a dozen girls, doubling our attendance and balancing the gender ratio. Suddenly the parking lot looks like something out of *Dazed and Confused*: Skinny girls and skinnier boys model vintage Eagles tees and toddler-sized Members Only jackets, downing PBR and White Russians hastily mixed in Dixie cups.

A light drizzle signals the start of the roller-skating party. The rink, an anonymous brick building situated off a highway, opens into a bright panorama of wax and neon. First on the floor, Matt lands on his ass within .003 seconds. Brushing himself off, he mumbles sheepishly, "I'm not used to speed skates."

Caleb shows him up, doing a fantastic robot dance in time to Usher's "Yeah!" The DJ is a stout, excitable young man who calls himself Swade. He works a party-starting mix that includes AC/DC's "You Shook Me All Night Long" and Destiny's Child's "Lose My Breath." Winning the kids over, Swade urges us to sneak in drinks despite a firm interdiction from the manager. Indeed, the rink's eight-ounce sodas don't quite cut it, so the band and posse start pouring Jameson 12 into styrofoam cups.

Galvanized by the trick, Jared takes a deep swig and beams, "I wanna see the sun when I walk out of this bitch!"

At one point, *Blender* counts 27 skaters on the rink, with a handful of partygoers scattered around the air-hockey table and pizza counter. There's even a heartwarming moment during "couples skate." As Jessica Simpson's "With You" chirps from the PA, several boys pair off and hold hands, circling slowly. Despite the pre-game booze orgy, everyone seems remarkably composed. "Watch out," Nate cautions *Blender*. "That girl in the yellow looks like she was born to puke in somebody's lap."

Duly warned, we check back in with Caleb, who is trying to rally a slender blonde into a game of Spin the Bottle outside. She's not going for it. "I'm dating J.T.!" she protests. "Who's J.T.?" we ask. "Exactly," mutters Caleb, spinning on his heels. He's clearly unaccustomed to such a display of resistance to his charms. Indefatigable, he heads back inside and adopts a different strategy, keeping an eye out for tumbles on the rink: "You get a girl to fall down, the hard part's over." So *that's* how you get a supermodel into bed. [BLENDER]

HOW THEY SPENT IT

KINGS OF LEON
NASHVILLE
NOVEMBER 29, 2004

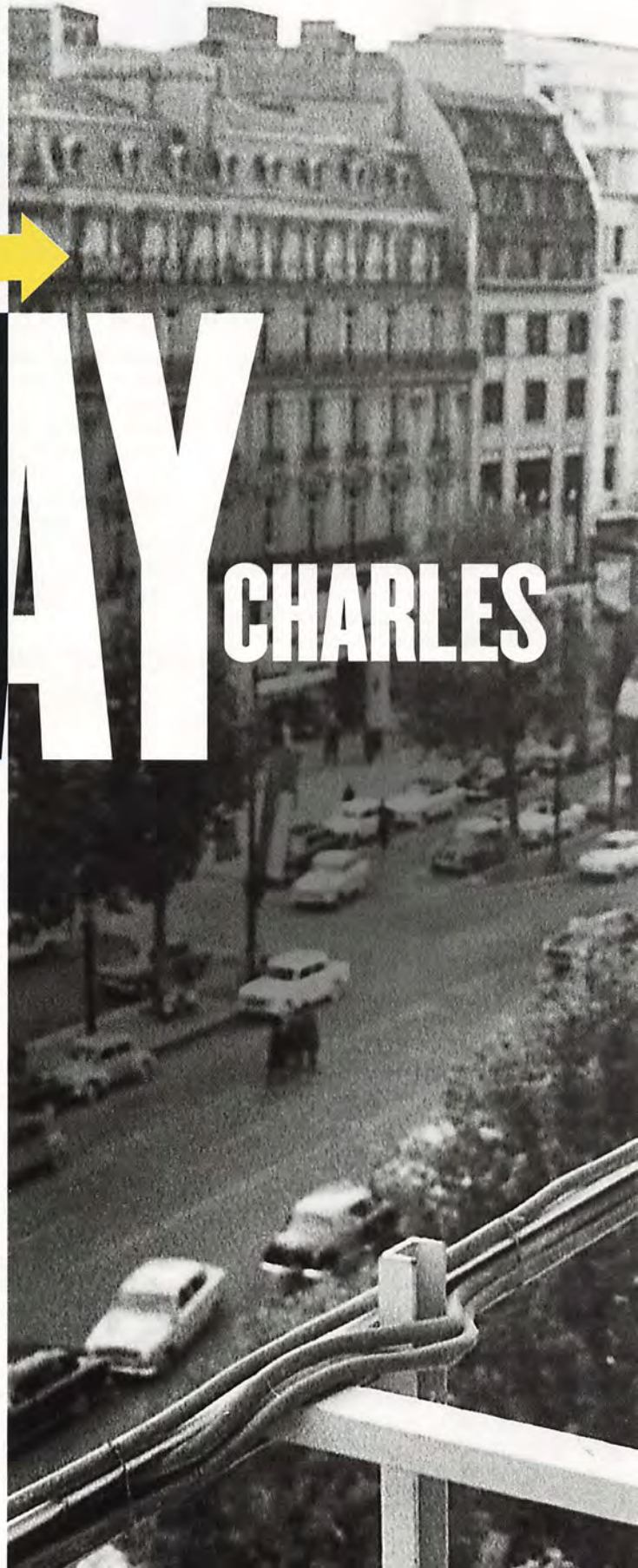
BEER & SODA	$41
LIQUOR	$407
SKATE CENTER RENTAL	$400
TOTAL	**$848**

33 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT...

RAY CHARLES

BEING BLIND DIDN'T STOP HIM INVENTING SOUL OR FLYING PLANES — AND HE WON SEVEN GRAMMY NOMINATIONS AFTER HIS DEATH. THERE'S A REASON THEY MADE A HIT MOVIE ABOUT THE MAN THEY CALLED "THE GENIUS"....

BY ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM

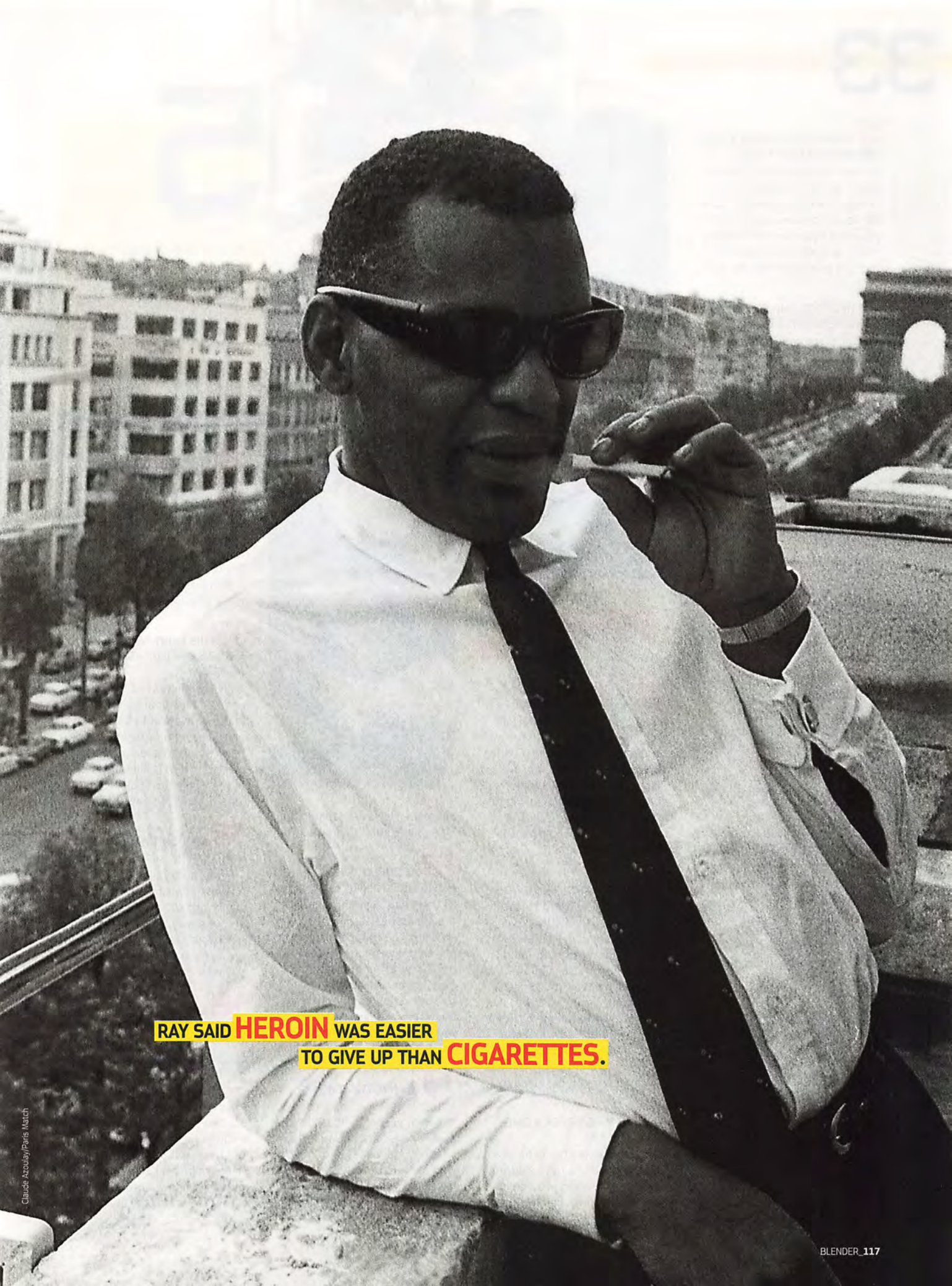


1 RAY CHARLES WASN'T HIS REAL NAME.
He was born Ray Charles Robinson on September 23, 1930, but throughout his childhood was known as "RC." Later, he dropped the Robinson because the boxer Sugar Ray Robinson was world middleweight champion at the time. "I figured two Ray Robinsons might be one too many," he wrote in his autobiography, *Brother Ray*.

2 HE WASN'T BORN BLIND.
He was five when his vision began to fade, probably as a result of glaucoma. He woke every morning to find his eyes stuck shut, and gradually he became unable to see distant objects; eventually he could only tell day from night and, finally, at seven, he became totally blind. As an adult, he was still able to remember what colors looked like, but he never got to see a city or an airplane.

3 HE GREW UP THE HARD WAY.
When he was five, his younger brother George drowned in a washtub in front of him; his mother, Aretha, died when he was 15; and he was entirely orphaned at 16 when his absentee father, Bailey, died too.

4 HE COULD PLAY ANYTHING.
Ray was educated at the School for the Deaf and Blind in St Augustine, Florida, where he learned to write music in Braille and play the piano, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet and organ. The school was segregated. To begin with, at least, Ray didn't notice: "Imagine the nonsense of segregating *blind* kids," he said later. "I mean, they can't even *see*!" →



RAY SAID HEROIN WAS EASIER TO GIVE UP THAN CIGARETTES.

Claude Azoulay/Paris Match

33 THINGS ABOUT RAY CHARLES

5 BEING BLIND DIDN'T STOP HIM DOING MANY THINGS.
He learned to ride a bike at the age of 10, and he regularly chopped wood and cooked. Later he would ride a motorcycle, drive a car and fly a plane. "Blindness didn't give me anything, and it didn't take anything," he said.

6 HIS FIRST PAIR OF SUNGLASSES WAS PAINTED ON.
Playing piano with his friend Gossie McKee in the McSon Trio in 1948, Ray sat for his first publicity picture – but afterward Gossie realized that people were unnerved by Ray's sightless eyes, and suggested he wear dark glasses. When the pictures were printed, he had a retoucher paint shades on Ray's uncovered face.

7 HIS SHOES TOLD HIM WHERE HE WAS GOING.
Walking around without a cane or a dog, Ray navigated by listening to the way the sound of his hard-soled shoes hitting the sidewalk echoed from the side of buildings. "Like a bat," he said.

8 RAY PLAYED IN SOME VERY UNLIKELY BANDS.
In 1948, he met one of the Florida Playboys – an all-white hillbilly country band – in Tampa and got a job at $15 a night. "My work was on piano, though I also learned how to yodel."

9 HE ALWAYS SAID HE BELIEVED IN TRUSTING PEOPLE.
But at the end of a gig he still insisted on being paid in single dollar bills. "He didn't want anybody to give him a dollar bill and tell him it was a hundred," says Atlantic Records' boss Ahmet Ertegun, who signed Charles to the label in 1952.

In *The Blues Brothers.*

"Hey, wait – this isn't heroin."

RAY COULD RIDE A MOTORCYCLE AND DRIVE A CAR.

10 HE DIDN'T FIGHT FAIR.
Being chased down a hotel hallway during a quarrel with fellow blind musician Al Hibbler, Charles set Hibbler up to step into an empty elevator shaft. Hibbler's girlfriend stopped him falling to his death at the last minute. "I must confess I would have let him go," said Ray.

11 IF YOU WANTED HITS, YOU HAD TO RECORD RAY'S WAY.
His first singles on Atlantic Records were made in New York with session musicians – and just didn't work. So in 1954 Ahmet Ertegun went down to Georgia and recorded Charles on the road. "And we came back with a bagful of hits," says Ertegun. "After that we only recorded him with his own band doing his own songs. I learned a lot from him."

12 HE WAS NEVER A ONE-WOMAN MAN.
Although married twice, he was fond of group sex, never faithful to either wife and had 12 children by several different girlfriends. "He was a busy man," says Dave Simmons, Ray's assistant in the '80s. "Let's put it that way."

Sugar Ray Robinson in 1950.

13 HE COULD "SEE" THE MUSIC LIKE NOBODY ELSE.
"If there was anything wrong in the music, he heard it right away. He'd go, 'The trumpet player played the wrong note in the fifth bar,'" says Ertegun. "He knew exactly where everything was, and he had a great memory for the whole arrangement. Even when we recorded with the big bands later on – 25 pieces."

14 HE INVENTED SOUL.
At first his revolutionary combination of gospel tunes and R&B heat – he reworked "My Jesus Is All the World to Me" into "I Got a Woman" – caused outrage. "Eventually they came 'round to it" said Ray. "They started calling it 'soul music.'"

15 HE WAS A CHESS FIEND.
Charles played constantly with friends Willie Nelson and Dizzy Gillespie, and would stay up all night for a game. He was very good at it. "I taught him how the pieces moved," says David "Fathead" Newman, who played sax in Charles's band in the '50s. "And after that, I was never able to beat him."

16 "UPTOWN GIRL"? LED ZEPPELIN? THAT WAS HIM TOO.
"I used to try to emulate Ray Charles when I would sing," says Billy Joel, who recorded the duet "Baby Grand" with Charles in 1986. "As did Steve Winwood, Rod Stewart – even Robert Plant was trying to do Ray Charles."

17 HIS MOST FAMOUS HIT WAS MADE UP AS HE WENT ALONG.
With 12 minutes left to fill at the end of a four-hour dance-hall set in the Midwest in 1958, he had played everything he knew. So Ray just began noodling on the electric piano. The improvisation became "What'd I Say" – Charles's first million-seller.

18 HE DIDN'T PAY HIS BAND MUCH.
"He was pretty tight around the pockets when it came to money," says Fathead Newman. "He would always say that he came up the hard way – very reluctant about giving the musicians raises and paying for food and lodging."

19 AND HE HAD AN UNCONVENTIONAL VIEW OF TAX LOOPHOLES FOR THE DISABLED.
"He said blind men didn't have to pay income tax," says Newman. "And I says, 'Ray, you're not selling pencils and brooms. You've started to make really big money.' He had cars and houses but he wasn't paying any tax, because he said blind people didn't. He knew that wasn't true – and eventually the IRS did come down on him." →

Charles: Bill Ray/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images; Robinson: Bettmann/Corbis; The Blues Brothers: Retna Ltd.

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33 THINGS ABOUT RAY CHARLES

With President Nixon, 1972.

Appearing in a Diet Pepsi commercial, 1991.

20 HE HAD A FRIGHTENINGLY GOOD MEMORY.

"Once we were staying in the same hotel in Atlanta, Georgia, and decided to go down to the coffee shop," Ahmet Ertegun remembers. "He took the stairs – and he ran down. I thought, 'Oh my god! He's going to kill himself!' But he'd memorized exactly how many steps there were. He just ran down. And scared the hell out of me."

21 HE MAY HAVE BEEN THE STRAIGHTEST JUNKIE EVER.

Despite being addicted to heroin for 17 years, he insisted it never affected his ability to play, sing or turn up to shows on time. "I've never been one of those dudes who got so strung-out he didn't know where he was or what he was doing. Grass, booze, heroin. I never did more than get my buzz – then back to work."

22 AND IT WAS VERY EASY FOR HIM TO QUIT.

When he decided to stop taking heroin, after being busted for possession in 1965, he checked himself into rehab and stopped – just like that. "Personally, it was harder to give up cigarettes."

23 HE LIKED POKER.

Charles had a deck of cards marked in Braille, and liked to gamble with the guys in the band. "But he wasn't allowed to deal," says Fathead. "He could feel the cards and had such a good memory he would know what he was giving everyone."

24 THE 'RAY CHARLES' COCKTAIL WOULD NOT BE A SUCCESS.

After giving up heroin, Charles had the same drink every day for the rest of his life: half a mug of black coffee, half a mug of Bols gin and two sugars. "I had that available at any time he called," says Dave Simmons. "It was the worst-tasting stuff ever! Terrible! Like battery acid!"

25 BUT HIS SLOT MACHINES FOR THE BLIND WERE.

In 2001 he went into partnership with Bally to produce Ray Charles–endorsed slots that played Ray's songs and had a Braille button deck. "Independence is a helluva thing, man," he said at the time.

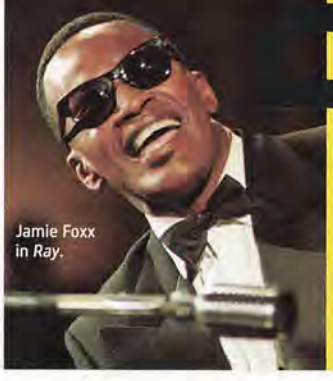
26 HE MADE COUNTRY MUSIC OK FOR EVERYONE.

His record company didn't want him to make his 1962 albums of country standards, *Modern Sounds in Country and Western, Volumes One and Two*. But he did anyway – and changed the genre forever. "He put soul in it," says Billy Joel. "Before Ray did 'I Can't Stop Loving You,' it was a dopey-ass, milk-white song done by hillbillies."

27 IN THE '60S HE TRIED EVERYTHING.

In 1960 he won a pop Grammy for "Georgia on My Mind," in 1961 an R&B one for "Hit the Road, Jack" and in 1962 a country Grammy for "I Can't Stop Loving You." "It's like a person who dresses up. Styles change, but you don't have to worry about the styles if you're elegant all the time."

28



Jamie Foxx in *Ray*.

THE MOVIE GOT IT EXACTLY RIGHT.

"*Ray* is the truth about Ray Charles's life. Jamie Foxx got him down incredibly," says Ahmet Ertegun. "His talk, his motions – unbelievable. He should get the Oscar for that performance."

29 HE PAID HIS DUES FOR CIVIL RIGHTS.

In 1961, Ray refused to play a show in a segregated venue in Georgia. The promoter sued for breach of contract. "I don't give a fuck," said Ray, and stood by his principles. He lost – but later that year made history by playing the first-ever integrated show in Memphis, Tennessee.

30 HE WAS READY TO RECORD WHEREVER HE WENT.

In the '70s and '80s, Charles toured the world constantly – and took an enormous tape recorder wherever he flew. "He always had that with him," says Dave Simmons. "I hated that thing: I had to carry it. And I never saw him use it."

31 RAY WAS AFRAID OF ONLY ONE THING: LOSING HIS HEARING.

"My eyes are my handicap, but my ears are my opportunity," he said. "To lose my hearing would be like death."

32 HE DIDN'T WANT JUST ANYONE TO PLAY HIM ONSCREEN.

Before he died, at 73, on June 10 last year, he tested Jamie Foxx on his piano playing to make sure he was the right man for the job – by getting him to play a line of Thelonius Monk jazz. "Come on, man, it's right under your fingers," he said when Foxx couldn't get it right the first time. "Ray," says director Taylor Hackford, "was not easy."

33 NOW HE'S BIGGER THAN EVER.

Last year's posthumously released duets album, *Genius Loves Company*, was nominated for seven Grammys and has become the best-selling album of his career. "I don't know if he was a genius," says Fathead Newman. "But he had a stroke of genius within him. Without a doubt."

FURTHER READING

BROTHER RAY BY DAVID RITZ
RAY CHARLES: MAN AND MUSIC BY MICHAEL LYDON

Nixon: Corbis; Pepsi: Still Photo/Sunshine/Retna Ltd.; Record: Alphonse Telymonde; Foxx: Universal Pictures

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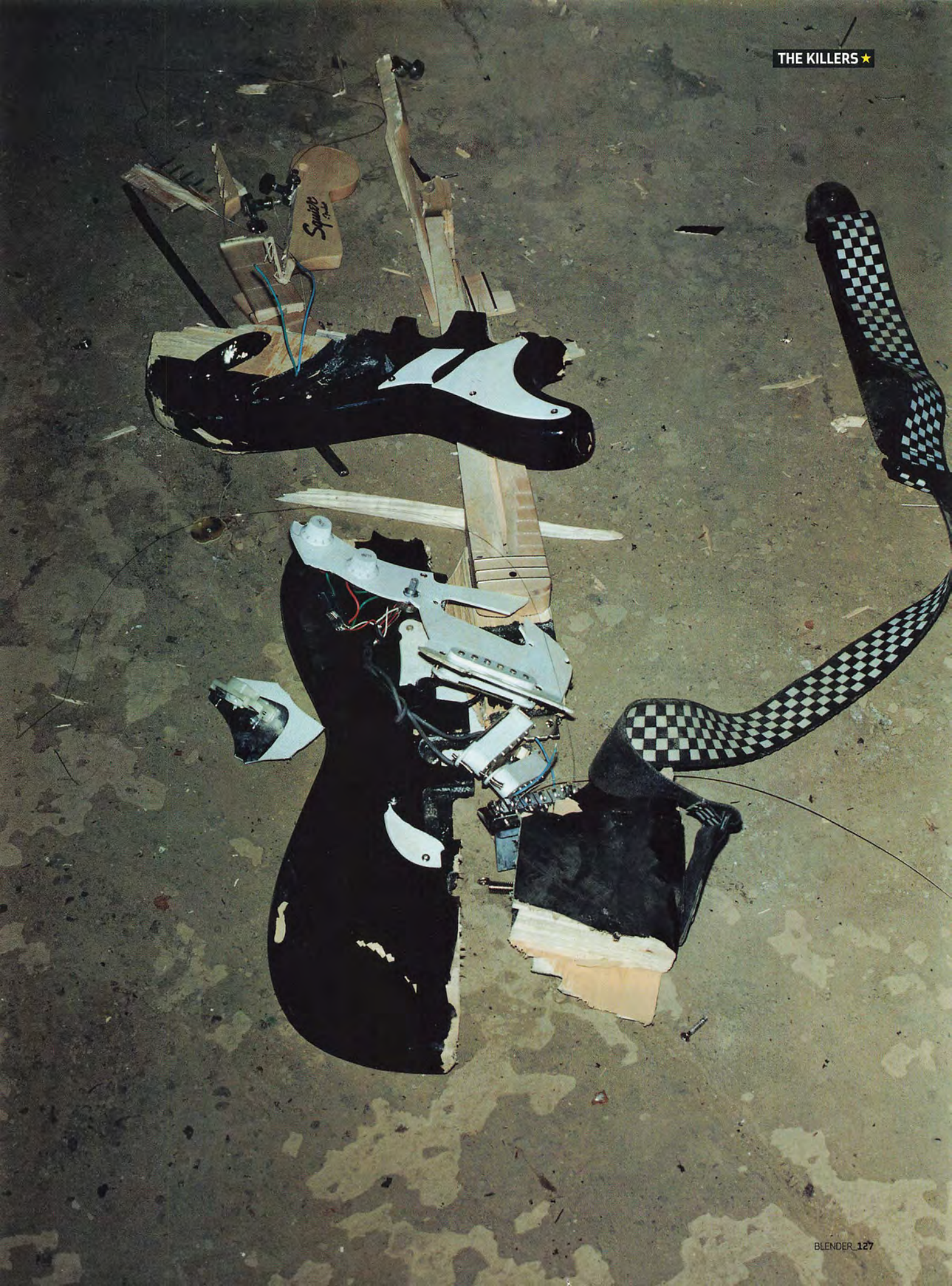
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BRIGHT EYES
Make a new album? That's for wimps! Indie whiz kid Conor Oberst has made *two*, each very different.
★★★★

136
KENNY CHESNEY
What is this king of Nashville doing? Trading in his cowboy hat for a Hawaiian shirt and rolling in the sand.
★★★★

146
NINE INCH NAILS
Obsessed with marching pigs and general spookiness, Trent Reznor's gothic masterpiece returns.
★★★★

THE GUIDE

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M.I.A.

She's like Missy, but political. Like Beenie Man, but cute. This Sri Lankan–born MC has made the first great party record of 2005.

Clockwise from top: Butch Hogan; Glen Rose; Joseph Cultice/Corbis Outline; David Titlow

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Indie-rock sensation moves to NYC, kisses girls, makes two very different records

BRIGHT EYES

I'M WIDE AWAKE, IT'S MORNING

✪✪✪✪

DIGITAL ASH IN A DIGITAL URN

✪✪✪

SADDLE CREEK

GEE, IT SUCKS to be Conor Oberst. You begin your career at age 14, in Omaha, Nebraska, get tagged "rock's boy genius," incite the nation's hottest rock scene by founding the label Saddle Creek, become the Pied Piper of "emo," release seven records by age 23 and then, when you're not singing on the Vote for Change tour with Bruce Springsteen (who introduces you as "someone whose record floored me") or partying with beauties in New York and Hollywood, you release two albums, simultaneously — and their respective singles take numbers one and two on the sales chart. No wonder he writes so many weepers.

He's got some nerve, the singer of Bright Eyes. Now he's dropping two separate albums at once — like Springsteen and Guns N' Roses before him, who at least waited until they were superstars to do it. Call this the Many Moods of Conor. *I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning* is acoustic, *Digital Ash in a Digital Urn* is electrified, and in the process he's facing down his one considerable burden: a rep as his generation's Bob Dylan.

Oberst comes closest to earning it on *I'm Wide Awake*. Bright Eyes has always been a personality-driven outfit, meaning its obsessive fans are magnetized by the breathless impressions, witty asides and trembling soul of its spooky, sensitive Donnie Darko of a frontman. This is the guy that begins *I'm Wide Awake* in coffeeshop-folkie mode, telling a story that starts suspensefully — an airline jet struck with fatal engine trouble — then kicks into a quick-strummed, spiritual call to arms: "Into the ear of every anarchist/That sleeps but doesn't dream/We must sing."

Oberst evokes the post-9/11 mood in his recently adopted home of NYC with amazing clarity. He bails on a Brooklyn party "while the world waits for an explosion," and in another song, makes love "on the living room floor with the noise in the background from a televised war." Piloting the sweet, pristinely recorded country songs, he takes us along as he hits loft parties, marches in war protests, tinkers with electro gadgets and gets wasted, heartbroken and guilt-sick, sometimes catching glimpses of transcendence in neon signs and subways.

DESPITE THE OUTRAGE, A TROUBADOUR OF HOPE.

This is hardly the pissy rhyme terrorist Dylan was at 24. Oberst's most genuinely Dylan-esque trait is his facility for merging the personal and political in a way that feels both conversational and otherworldly. In the stately "Old Soul Song," he poetically links protesters spilling over barricades to flowers growing on a hillside, describing both in the softly sung refrain "They went wild" — the last word hanging in the air like a promising breeze. Despite all the lonely missives and political outrage, Oberst comes off more like a troubadour of hope.

The less convincing *Digital Ash* sets Oberst's quavering voice against synth melodies, digital smudgescapes and guest guitar by Nick Zinner of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. It's "electric" in the epicurean New Wave manner of Oberst's Saddle Creek labelmates the Faint: breezy synth washes, percolating Yaz arpeggios and chirpy Cure keyboard melodies, all of which may have unconsciously caused Oberst to lift the melody for "I Believe in Symmetry" from Nena's 1984 hit "99 Luftballons."

Jimmy Tamborello of the Postal Service molds the best song, "Take It Easy (Love Nothing)," into a sugarcoated confessional of heartlessness, with lyrics that sketch a bad breakup, then catalogue its aftermath in a list of callous behavior that includes songwriting. Mostly, these electro trances — built around ominous hum, jagged breathing, ringing alarm clock — sound like an ill-advised quest to make a Williamsburg version of *Dark Side of the Moon*. The electronics dislocate a voice that needs to be focused and intimate to succeed. When he shudders during the songs' dramatic peaks, Oberst sounds as if he's singing atop a washing machine in spin cycle.

But for the most part, Oberst has learned how to use his shaky, vulnerable warble to deadly effect. On the hushed, gentle *Wide Awake* song "Lua," Oberst appraises the misery underneath glam urban nightlife with a lilting, nursery-rhyme refrain that accrues a rueful beauty. It's an elegant little gem, the kind of song you get to write only after 500 more-baroque efforts, and it's hard to imagine anyone else doing it quite that right.

"I could be a famous singer/If I had someone else's voice," Oberst jokes. But we already have enough pretty voices. Oberst's is quirky, passionate and recklessly real — cracks, quivers and all.

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD: "Lua," "Landlocked Blues," "Road to Joy," "Take It Easy (Love Nothing)"

CONOR OBERST'S CURRENT LISTENING

BLOOD BROTHERS
CRIMES
V2
"This is an amazingly brutal record that is so fun to listen to. The music sounds like smoking coke, and the vocals remind me of a twisted James Brown or the late, great Timmy Taylor of Brainiac."

COCOROSIE
LA MAISON DE MON RÊVE
TOUCH AND GO
"This record is so beautiful and strange and lo-fi and psych and folk and mysterious. It gets better and better with repeated listens, which is always a good thing."

NAS
STREETS DISCIPLE
COLUMBIA
"Finally, Nas has returned to save Top 40 rap. He might be a bit over the top with his whole messiah-rapper bit, but he still has the raddest beats and sickest flow of anyone. I'm sure Jesus would approve."

TV ON THE RADIO
DESPERATE YOUTH, BLOOD-THIRSTY BABES
TOUCH AND GO
"They are one of the most exciting and innovative rock bands to come along in a long while. Indie rock has never been so soulful or transcendent. And I love vampire references."

Butch Hogan

Conor Oberst: Not allowed to make another album until he tidies his room.

NIRVANA

With The Lights Out

"'With the Lights Out' is a modern pop rarity: one of the few retrospectives that doesn't seem merely a greedy marketing device. It's a warm, absorbing chronicle of the creative process of a writer whose introspective songs examined the uncertainty and longing of adolescence."

- LOS ANGELES TIMES

"It's Nirvana as the band Kurt Cobain thought it should have been: noisy, anarchic, unadorned and true in sound and spirit to the independent under-ground rock he cared about most."

- NEW YORK TIMES

KKKKK Review
"An unparalleled insight into the creative mind of a towering giant of popular music – and as such is a work of singular, epochal significance."

- KERRANG

A- Review
"Raw, messy, and undeniably moving, 'With the Lights Out' captures the essence of Nirvana."

- ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

"It's essential."

- NME

★★★★ Review
"If you think you want it. you do."

- ROLLING STONE

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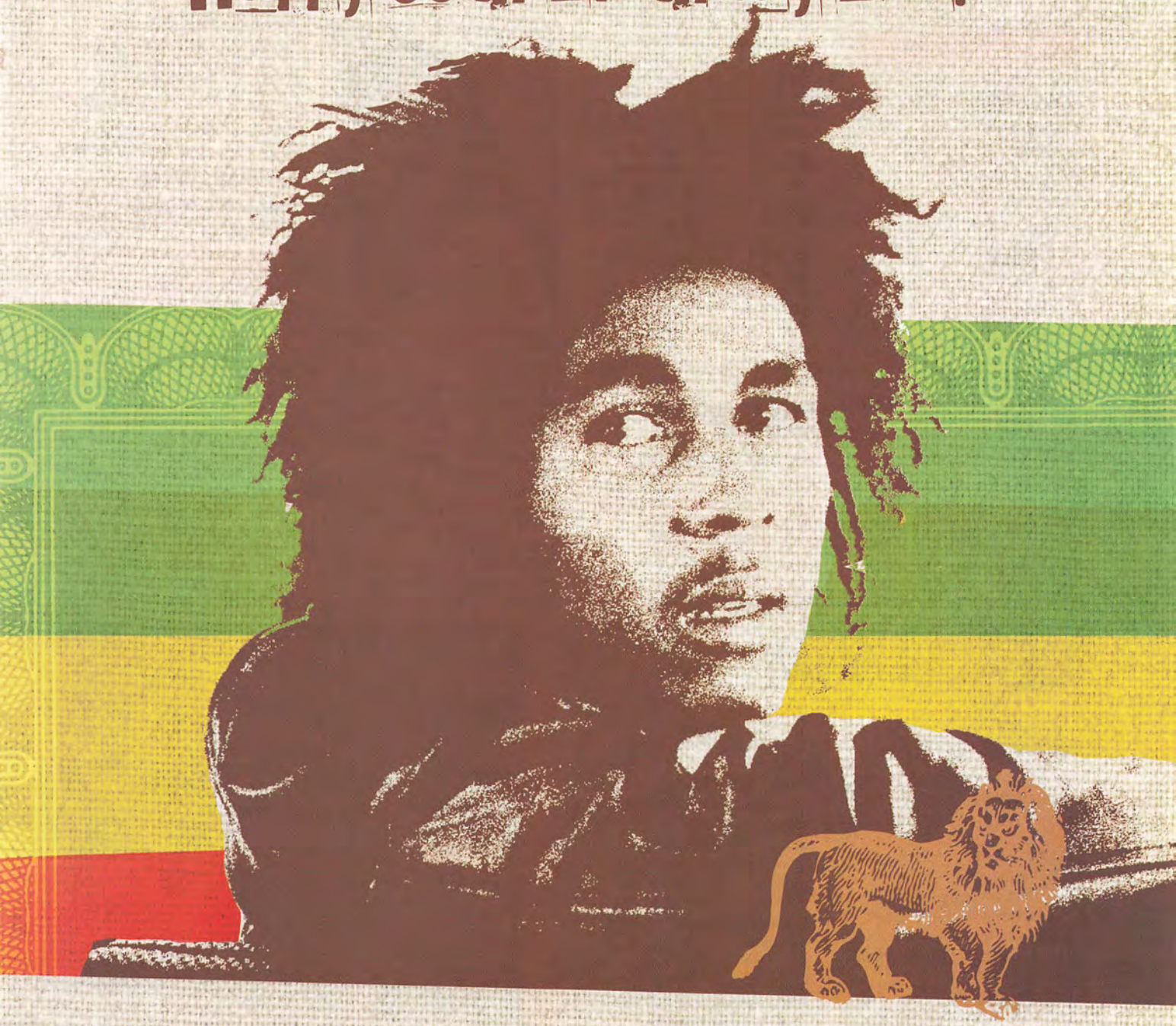

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. . . AND YOU WILL KNOW US BY THE TRAIL OF DEAD

WORLDS APART ✪✪✪

INTERSCOPE

Spruced-up Texan art-rockers headbutt their way into the mainstream

The unlikely domestication of these Texas wildmen continues. In 2002, this instrument-smashing, avant-garde rock quintet's major-label debut, *Source Tags and Codes*, evoked a poppier Sonic Youth, but they now bring to mind an artier U2. On this unexpectedly clean-cut record, their twin-guitar offensive is as epic as ever, but the time-signature shifts and feedback swirls that earned them minor adulation are sidelined in favor of pushy, arena-sized choruses. On "Let It Dive," they even out-anthem Oasis, with a grammar-mangling singalong for the ages ("Let it come between you and I"). They may be conflicted about their newfound accessibility — the catchiest track lamely blasts "those cunts on MTV" — but their slab-like sound has never soared this high.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: "Will You Smile Again for Me," "Let It Dive"

ANTONY AND THE JOHNSONS

I AM A BIRD NOW ✪✪✪

SECRETLY CANADIAN

Unique falsetto chanteuse from New York gathers support from his gender-bending forefathers

The mononamed Antony is a soul chanteuse trapped in the androgynous body of an East Village performance artist. There's a hint of avant-garde snobbery to his chamber-music collective (their biggest gig so far was in a museum, for the 2004 Whitney Biennial), but one blast of Antony's sobbing, unearthly vibrato should sweep away any skepticism. Backed by quiet piano and strings, these bluesy spirituals are so raw they bleed; songs like the late-night plea for connection "Hope There's Someone" and the pre-op transsexual hymn "For Today I Am a Boy" seem to spring from a bottomless well of sorrow. Famous fans including Lou Reed and Rufus Wainwright contribute cameos, though Antony upstages everyone except Boy George, who pledges gender-bending solidarity on the achingly sincere "You Are My Sister."

Tragically, Antony had run out of Post-it notes.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: "Hope There's Someone," "For Today I Am a Boy," "You Are My Sister"

ANUBIAN LIGHTS

PHANTASCOPE ✪✪✪

RHYTHMBANK

Boyish New York City punk rock veteran salvages her long-lost career with smart, snarky club music

Twenty-five years ago, Adele Bertei was the androgynous gamine whose uncanny timing on a cheap organ made her the secret weapon of James Chance's punk-funk Contortions. Unfortunately, her eagerly awaited next move turned out to be a few forgettable club hits. But here she emerges from involuntary retirement to fulfill her promise with L.A.-via-London beatmasters Tommy Grenas and Len Del Rio. "Wild Winter" and "Way Gone Man" are as mean and angular as her old fans might dream. And though things chill out once they're done, she's become a crafty vocalist, and her bandmates

From top: Don Felix Cervantes; Glen Rose

BEACH BUM

A country king who dreams of the Caribbean sand

KENNY CHESNEY

BE AS YOU ARE: SONGS FROM AN OLD BLUE CHAIR ✪✪✪✪

BNA

KENNY CHESNEY, 36, is country's reigning Entertainer of the Year, the standard-bearer of mainstream Nashville. He has been sharpening his music for years, and his penetrating tenth album contents itself with none of the handy country topics — no tear-stained songs about love or trucks, no half-cocked politics, no glistening fried chicken.

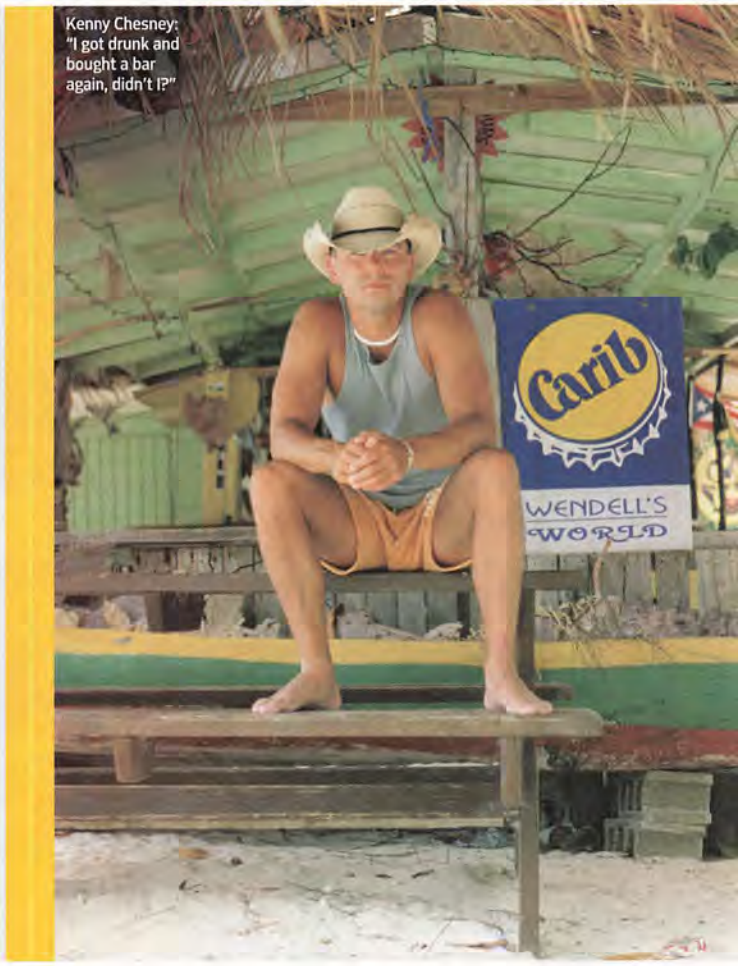
The basis of these dozen songs is simple: Man longs to exchange the stress of daily life for the serenities of the beach — tremendously, seriously, desperately *longs*. Yet the tone of these literate tunes remains as light as Chesney's singing of them stays soulful. The suite begins with "Old Blue Chair" — a rocker that sits rotting on the Caribbean sand, the seat of his fond memories of busted love, hangovers and afternoons spent reading Hemingway. The title tune is about the wisdom of accepting yourself, whether "a tourist, a beach bum or a star." And Chesney celebrates a pal who sustains himself as an "Island Boy," where "stress is the enemy."

In the middle, he sings three tunes — the quasi-mystical "Somewhere in the Sun," the effortlessly narrative "Boston," the dry-wet "Something Sexy About the Rain" — so intense that he follows with "French Kissing Life" and "Key Lime Pie," rife with silliness and risqué lines.

In the '80s, Randy Travis signaled that a country singer could exhale the tradition of George Jones while driving a brand-new Lexus. In the '90s, Garth Brooks insisted that a country singer could jump like Aerosmith. Now, Chesney advances the argument. Country singers, he insists, can discuss anything, even locations beyond the Deep South. They love the farm. But that doesn't mean they have to stay on it.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD: "She Came From Boston," "Soul of a Sailor"



Kenny Chesney: "I got drunk and bought a bar again, didn't I?"

Guess what Ashanti's grandma gave her for Christmas.

have gifts in the electro mode she favored in the '80s: Try the Africanized "New Wildlife," or the Eno-fied "Ultraviolet."

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD: "Wild Winter," "Way Gone Man"

ASHANTI

CONCRETE ROSE ✪✪

THE INC./DEF JAM

Ashanti's third album hits Beyoncé levels of sexy — then hits the snooze button

Is Ashanti afflicted with post-Beyoncé syndrome? On "Only U," the fervent first single here, she manifests symptoms: a sudden allergy to the sweet, coy and cutesy stuff that's been her hallmark till now (e.g. the word "baby"), accompanied by unbridled, uninhibited, moan-inducing desire. Ear-catching electric guitar injects Ashanti's voice — usually as wispy and cloying as cotton candy — with fresh zeal. Sadly, the sickness stops there. The rest of the album is so monotonous in its R&B pleasantry that even artless cameos from rappers T.I. ("Still Down") and Ja Rule ("Turn It Up") are welcome distractions. Ashanti's love songs sound the way you feel after a sleepless night of second-rate sex: groggy, enervated, not crazy in love but barely in like.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD: "Only U"

BRAZILIAN GIRLS

BRAZILIAN GIRLS ✪✪✪✪

VERVE

For fans of Brazilian-Japanese-tango-boho-disco-sex music. And for you, too.

The debut album by New York's Brazilian Girls celebrates grooves ("Dance Till the Morning"), sex ("Pussy"), getting high ("Don't Stop") and internationalism (the whole album). It's almost ridiculously chic, but look closer: They're not Brazilian, there's only one girl and the moment you worry about whether or not to take them seriously, you're missing the fun of the record. Under samples of accordion, *cavaquinho*, tango orchestras and whatever else, there's a funky live quartet at work, backing up Italian singer Sabina Sciubba, who sounds like spring water in six different languages. Echoes of Portishead, the Specials' second album and Bebel Gilberto mark the basic territory, but don't miss their nicely vulgar sense of humor.

BEN RATLIFF

DOWNLOAD: "Don't Stop," "Corner Store," "Die Gedanken Sind Frei"

BUCK 65

THIS RIGHT HERE IS BUCK 65 ✪✪✪✪

V2

Choice new bits and highlights from the great weirdo rapper's out-there catalogue, including a Woody Guthrie cover

Over the course of seven obscure albums, Richard Terfry, a.k.a. Buck 65, has rapped like someone whittling a stick of wood, shaving off fine wisps of thought until a sharply defined narrative emerges. To better complement his rough-hewn backwoods croak, Buck re-recorded some of these tracks — half never released, the rest tough to find — with a band. In "Cries a Girl," over slide guitar and a trip-hop beat, he achingly details a small town's decay, describing the tears of a young woman there as "diamonds dividing in the corners of her eyes." On the travelogue "Wicked n Weird," which matches a bouncy old- ➔

I LOVE THIS CD!

ROSARIO DAWSON
ACTRESS, *KIDS, ALEXANDER*

VAN MORRISON
ASTRAL WEEKS
WARNER BROS.

"I saw him twice in New York a couple of months ago, once at Irving Plaza and once at Madison Square Garden. He was just amazing."

From top: Tony Duran; Jeffrey Mayer/Wirelmage.com

GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Richard Stofle and his wife, Corine, backstage with Story of the Year.

WINNER'S "STORY OF THE YEAR"

IN NOVEMBER, *Blender* reader Richard Stofle won the **Nintendo Fusion Tour Sweepstakes,** which awarded him the chance to fly to sunny Orlando, meet Story of the Year, rock out at their show and be the eyes and ears of *Blender* magazine. Now, in the words of Richard himself, we get a first look into his adventures . . .

"Aaaah, the Sunshine State! *Blender* and Nintendo were kind enough to take us from Governator city (Sacramento, California) to the place where birds sing pretty songs and there's always music in the air: Orlando!

We got to hang out backstage with the guys from Story of the Year on Nov. 8 at the Hard Rock Live!, where they were playing one of the last shows of the Nintendo Fusion tour.

Now, whoever said these guys could only take punches was terribly wrong [*Blender* 31, p.50]. We got our asses kicked by Josh and Adam . . . playing *WWE Day of Reckoning* on Nintendo Gamecube, that is.

Story of the Year put on an insane show that featured some guitar-throwing, back-flipping, Lynyrd Skynyrd–covering, pants-ripping and pants-throwing action."

OUR CONCLUSIONS:

1. **Nintendo sure knows how to throw a party** (the show included awesome up-and-coming bands like Autopilot Off, Letter Kills, Anberlin, lostprophets and My Chemical Romance).

2. **Playing videogames is a good thing** (it might even get you the love of some good-looking gal in an I LOVE NERDS shirt).

OUR ADVICE TO YOU: *Read* Blender*—it will take you places!*

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The Kings of Leon regret lending their lawnmower to the Strokes.

MODELS? *YAWN.*

Tennessee youngsters see the world, come back scarred

KINGS OF LEON

AHA SHAKE HEARTBREAK ✪✪✪✪

RCA

TWO YEARS AGO, the Kings of Leon came strutting out of Nashville like a prefab rock myth. The Followill boys, sons and nephew of a traveling Pentecostal preacher, had a backstory to die for, hirsute good looks and a stash-box full of grooves as tight as their jeans — Stillwater come alive.

Barnstorming the world, the Followills after-partied with supermodels. Three of the four lost their virginity. And thus the theme for a second album emerged. If their debut was a night of chasing skirts and drinking Jim Beam from the bottle, *Heartbreak* is the bitter, worn-out morning after.

A BITTER, WORN-OUT ROCK RECORD.

It's a cliché, but one they're good at. "King of the Rodeo" and first single "The Bucket" revive their rush of red-state rock. But gone are the killers, thieves and whores the Kings once lionized. Instead they're jaded and self-conscious, fretting about going bald and confessing their sexual (mis)adventures. "Girls are gonna love the way I toss my hair," Caleb Followill sighs and even he can't believe he's not more excited.

There's nonsense, too, which is either willfully obscure or, worse, downright offensive. (The casual misogyny of "Taper Jean Girl" seems especially out of line.) But it's easy to overlook what Caleb sings because of the way he sings it — a slurred, muddy growl, part John Fogerty and part mountain-lion-in-heat, that's rousing and world-weary at once.

The record closes with a bleary waltz whose opening couplet — "On the plane, on the plane/Off to see the city girls again" — would have been cause for celebration once; now it just means another long night on the road. Which isn't so different from how they grew up: crammed into a station wagon, shuttling from town to town, stealing kisses on the sly, takin' time to make time. The difference is, now there's less time to make — and now the girls steal right back.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "Slow Night, So Long," "The Bucket," "King of the Rodeo"

CALEB FOLLOWILL'S CURRENT LISTENING:

THE FEATURES EXHIBIT A *ISLAND*

VARIOUS ARTISTS ST. ELMO'S FIRE: ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK *ATLANTIC*

school-style break with banjo, he sounds like a tongue-twisting trucker on speed. While inventing voices, Buck ingeniously borrows from dub ("Bandits"), metal ("463") and country ("Roses & Bluejays") to capture his characters' woozy worlds. Welcome, finally, to his.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD: "Cries a Girl," "Wicked n Weird," "Bandits"

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS

PUSH THE BUTTON ✪✪✪

ASTRALWERKS

On their fifth album, the British DJs come through the Dance Crash of '04 with flying (psychedelic) colors

History students turned groove alchemists, Ed Simons and Tom Rowlands are dance music's most influential modern act and its most outward-looking, working with Liam Gallagher, the Flaming Lips and other rockers rather than with other DJs. This is their first set since the glow-sticks of electronica's late-'90s boom went out all over the world. Their response to that wane is to toughen up and spread out musically. "Galvanize" sets rapper Q-Tip alongside what sounds like ancient Iraqi techno; on "The Big Jump," tinny guitars spar with uncut '80s synths; "Surface to Air" might be their most beautiful mind-melody yet. The missing links between club night, rock show and 2001-style cosmic experience, these boys are still worth digging.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD: "Galvanize," "Come Inside"

ASTONISHING FACT!

Before the Cribs were signed to a record deal, the band's three brothers worked for the U.K.'s leading toilet-paper company.

THE CRIBS

THE CRIBS ✪✪✪

WICHITA

On this debut, Brit brothers thrash around in their garage, pondering the mystery that is Woman

Before they turned 10, these three West Yorkshire brothers were regular jammers at family parties. Sixteen years later, they attack garage-rock with similar boyish glee. Ryan Jarman's empathetic whine transforms "You Were Always the One" and "Another Number" into endearing outsider anthems and — after gigging more than 200 shows last year — the siblings confidently fluctuate between Strokes-y sing-alongs ("Things You Should Be Knowing") and thrash freakouts ("Third Outing"). Now if only they could do something about the stunted relationships detailed in these songs, where faithless girlfriends cheat on the band members — before the lads can do it to them first. The Cribs have developed musically since their childhood performances, but they're still thumbsuckers when it comes to dealing with women.

TIM GRIERSON

DOWNLOAD: "You Were Always the One," "Another Number"

DiFranco: "Mr. Bond, I've been expecting you."

JOHN DAVIS

JOHN DAVIS ✪✪✪

RAMBLER

Former Superdrag singer gets sober, mixes the Beatles and God, invents a new genre: Higher Power pop

If Brian Wilson had tithed to a Pentecostal church instead of to his meddling shrink Dr. Landy, he'd sound something like this. Davis, who spent over a decade leading punky poppers Superdrag, now multitracks his voice to trill about Jesus and salvation. And if it helped him achieve his goal (sobriety) and still permits him to write lovely secular hymns to his squeeze ("Me & My Girl"), let's hear it for a Higher Power. Davis really cranks the fuzzed-guitar and massed-choral power-pop on "Nothing Gets Me Down" and "Too Far Out," and for every mid-tempo supplication to cast out Satan ("Jesus Gonna Build Me a Home"), there are at least three

I LOVE THIS CD!

TOPHER GRACE
ACTOR; IN GOOD COMPANY, THAT '70S SHOW

U2
HOW TO DISMANTLE AN ATOMIC BOMB
INTERSCOPE

"I just got the new CD, so I've been popping that. U2 are the best band in the universe, despite having been around so long."

Clockwise from top left: Jo McCaughey; Danny Clinch; Steve Granitz/WireImage.com

The Chemical Brothers: Very lame shadow puppeteers.

more splendid psychedelic crunchers right behind, keeping Davis's music rooted in the glowing flesh.

KEN TUCKER

DOWNLOAD: "Me & My Girl," "Nothing Gets Me Down," "Tear Me Apart"

ANI DIFRANCO

KNUCKLE DOWN ✪✪✪

RIGHTEOUS BABE

Bohemian songstress and indie veteran longs for some water

BUFFALO'S GREATEST SONGWRITER!

When it comes to music and emotions, Ani DiFranco dives right in. On this, the latest in the Buffalo songwriter's yearly release of CDs she has written and sung since 1990, she's still at it, changing meters and tempos and moods and folk-based instrumentation, cooing and crooning and talking and barking through an enraptured flow of words, words and more words. On pieces such as "Manhole," the spoken "Parameters," and "Seeing Eye Dog," – in which DiFranco sings "I want to take a long, cool drink from your bucket" – she wrestles with the idiosyncrasies and sins of her partners. On the title tune and "Studying Stones," she interrogates her own feelings just as ruggedly. DiFranco seems less the compulsive confessor here, more the storyteller. Even neo-hippie queens grow up.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD: "Seeing Eye Dog," "Studying Stones"

ANDREA ECHEVERRI

ANDREA ECHEVERRI ✪✪✪✪

NACIONAL

Latin hippie chronicles the birth of her daughter, makes motherhood sound positively sexy

A few songs into her first solo CD, on the sultry grind "A Eme O," Andrea Echeverri tells her 2-year-old daughter, "Since you were born, I've become a better lover/It's as if you've unplugged my tubes." That's also how it sounds: Replacing the assertive sheen of Aterciopelados, the Colombian band she fronts, with more earthy tones, Echeverri offers a series of breezy, unassuming, yet totally addictive refrains about motherhood and womanhood, sex and love. Sung mostly in Spanish, some build on folkloric rhythms ("Quedate") while others are looped and layered, treating their Latinness as incidental (the snakelike "Ya Yo No"). All have a disarming, seductive power that renders the organizing concept – the record has two parts, "La Cuna" ("The Crib") and "La Cama" ("The Bed") – completely academic.

TOM MOON

DOWNLOAD: "A Eme O," "Meno Mal," "Ya Yo No," "Quedate"

EISLEY

ROOM NOISES ✪✪✪

REPRISE

Coldplay's favorite sci-fi-loving Christian rock teens

They borrowed their name from a seedy, intergalactic *Star Wars* space port, but this full-length debut is no hive of scum and villainy. As well-adjusted as home-schooled Christian girl-boy siblings could be, Eisley deal in sunny melodies, wide-open skies and only slightly adulterated optimism. Like a pre-cynical Rilo Kiley or a rightsized Polyphonic Spree, they summon a grand sonic sweep with modest garage-band means (it makes sense that Coldplay handpicked them as tourmates in 2003) and they're unafraid to sing hokey lines ("Wake up! The sun is beautiful!"). They're young – chief songwriter Stacy DuPree is only 16 – but there's a surefootedness and subtlety here to shame many elders.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD: "One Day I Slowly Floated Away," "Telescope Eyes," "Trollywood" ➔

GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

HOLIDAY JAMS

★ ON DECEMBER 2, *Blender* and Capitol Records helped provide Times Square **Champs Sports** consumers with some holiday cheer. A live DJ from Scratch DJ Academy spun hip-hop tunes as customers shopped the store for great deals on footwear and accessories. Every customer making a purchase took home a CD sampler featuring music from the motion picture *Coach Carter*.

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EMMA

FREE ME ✪✪✪

UNIVERSAL

Former Spice Girl dislikes today, hides in the 1960s

Forever squeezed to the back of the limo by the bachelorette-party antics of Sporty, Scary, Ginger and Posh, the quiet girl of the Spice classroom, Emma "Baby" Bunton, now gets the last laugh — at least she's still got a record deal. Reasoning that Emma's star power is a flickering, low-wattage thing, *Free Me* foregrounds a series of meticulous '60s pop pastiches. Before you can say "Bond theme," strings unfurl, muted trumpets murmur and truckloads of Latin percussion are unloaded on songs which seldom cry out for big-time arrangements. There's none of the kitsch value that usually attends these time-warp exercises — she's a pop act, not an art project — and it's all reasonably well-constructed, if less substantial than the average *Bridget Jones* sequel.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD: "Crickets Sing for Anamaria," "Maybe"

MARIANNE FAITHFULL

BEFORE THE POISON ✪✪✪

ANTI-/EPITAPH

High priestess of gloom gets propped up by some alt-rock mopers

Marianne Faithfull is a tragedian. Her enduring sense of intelligent melancholy defined Swinging London (the '60s pop madrigal "As Tears Go By") as well as New Wave 1979 (*Broken English*), then turned the century as postmodern cabaret (*Strange Weather*). At 58, her friends are newly graying alt-rockers: Beck and Billy Corgan last time, PJ Harvey and Nick Cave this round. *Before the Poison* is elegant primitivism — Harvey's guitar on "My Friends Have," stuttering keyboards and screech sax from Cave's crew on "Desperanto." Faithfull could use more stories to work with: She's a better singer of narratives than exotic phrases. Still, it's devastating how she makes "we saw the green fields turn into homes, such pretty homes" encapsulate the whole history of English fatalism.

ERIC WEISBARD

DOWNLOAD: "Last Song," "No Child of Mine"

THE FIERY FURNACES

EP ✪✪✪

ROUGH TRADE

Singles, B-sides and three unreleased songs from indie rock's new darlings

The Fiery Furnaces push the indie-rock ethic to the wall: drums that sound like garbage, sub-beginner's piano, unrhyming run-on lyrics, a new album every fortnight. But they also do a persuasive job of pretending they invented the shit. And the brother-and-sister duo have an unimpeachable strength in Eleanor Friedberger, weird and self-possessed enough to sing every nonsensical place-name as if it's her ode to youth. The bulk of these short songs — including the B-side "Evergreen," the most studied Pixies bite you'll ever hear — boil down to a single hook, unlike the suite constructions on 2004's notoriously ambling and word-stuffed *Blueberry Boat*. But wouldn't you prefer to hear a precious band really be precious, and give you that 15-minute epic, rather than try to imitate a pop band?

BEN RATLIFF

DOWNLOAD: "Evergreen," "Tropical-Iceland"

Emma Bunton: "I say! Where's my monocle?"

THE FRAMES

BURN THE MAPS ✪✪✪

ANTI-/EPITAPH

Veteran Dublin rockers hope to fiddle their way across the Atlantic with spirited fifth album

The Frames may be the best Americana band America's never heard of. They've spent the last dozen years churning out emerald-tinted alt-country that fills stadiums in their homeland but couldn't fill a rec room in the States. *Maps* aims to change that, swapping the band's trademark dreariness for the U2-style arena-rock sweep that makes their live shows — and 2003's live *Set List* — so exciting. Sometimes it's hushed and solemn (the chillingly pretty "Happy"), other times it's brash and defiant (the spit-in-your-face "Underglass"). And at its emotionally raw, acerbic best — like "Fake," where singer Glen Hansard kicks an ex's door down with his heart in his hand and Guinness on his breath — it's both all at once.

ASTONISHING FACT!

Frames singer Glen Hansard dropped out of school at 13 and supported himself by busking on the streets of Dublin.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "Happy," "Fake," "Underglass"

SAGE FRANCIS

HEALTHY DISTRUST ✪✪✪

EPITAPH

Rhode Island's best rapper ever gets his angst on

"They're too scared to shoot me in the heart — it's too big!" Being bulletproof is a tried-and-true rap pose, but few have guarded their chests like Rhode Island softy and "angster of love" Sage Francis. Here, this booming indie eccentric (he's known to throw broccoli during live shows) completes his journey from the battle circuit to the world of self-help, encouraging you to challenge authority, read Kerouac ("Escape Artist") and listen to Johnny Cash. But the hypervulnerable Francis is no bumper-sticker rapper — his fire-and-brimstone confessionals are as complex as they are venomous, especially on the counterculture stomp of "The Buzz Kill" or the firearms-as-phallus rap "Gunz Yo." It's a rare thing: hip-hop to soothe, rather than hurt, your feelings.

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD: "The Buzz Kill," "Crumble"

Marianne Faithfull: "Gloomy? Me?"

KENNY G

AT LAST . . . THE DUETS ALBUM ✪✪

ARISTA

Even at two stars, it's Kenny G's best album ever!

Kenny G's saxophone is like store-brand oatmeal: a mushy, bland, fruitless rendition of a hearty dish. It's easy to digest, though. The not-that-old G (and his Michael Bolton-esque mane) have peddled more than a dozen releases, including the best-selling instrumental album of all time. His new set of sundry cover tunes has one redeeming value: It adds quality vocals, courtesy of adult-contemporary stars like Daryl Hall and Barbra Streisand. When singers take center stage — Chaka Khan fortifies Christina Aguilera's "Beautiful," Earth Wind & Fire outfunk Outkast ("The Way You Move") and Brian McKnight lends George Michael the soul he strives for ("Careless Whisper") — Kenny G is relegated to a mere footnote. And since his sterile-sounding sax produces fine background music, that's precisely where he should be.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD: "Beautiful," "Careless Whisper"

ED HARCOURT

STRANGERS ✪✪✪✪

ASTRALWERKS

Nice-guy keyboardist avenges his broken heart with — run! — a song cycle

Ed Harcourt is the Badly Drawn Boy next door. Smart and cute, sweet and a touch goofy, he's a disarmingly talented songwriter who doesn't act like the brightest boy in the class. On his third CD, this Brit traces the whole dizzyingly, unutterably life-changing arc of one relationship. The music is cheery even when the feelings are miserable; it's like rainy-day Smiths driven by pianos instead of guitars. It sags a little in the middle, when Harcourt sounds as if he's running out of air and his voice gets high, but it recovers by the end, just as Harcourt recovers fully from the

I LOVE THIS CD!

HEATHER GRAHAM
ACTRESS, *BOOGIE NIGHTS, EVERQUEST II*

VARIOUS ARTISTS
GARDEN STATE: MUSIC FROM THE MOTION PICTURE
EPIC

"Zach Braff gave it to me when I did *Scrubs*, and it has cool new bands I didn't know, so it was like a good mix tape."

Clockwise from top left: Darren Feinst; Jean-Baptise Mondino; Jamie McCarthy/Wireimage.com

breakup. As for "Born in the '70s": Ryan Adams wishes he'd written this Eagles-y Gen X song.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD: "The Storm is Coming," "Born in the '70s," "This One's for You"

THE LEGENDS

UP AGAINST THE LEGENDS

★★★★

LAKESHORE

Heretofore unknown Swedes get their indelible pop on

As the leader of this Swedish nine-piece, Johan Angergård strips pop music down to its basics — hand-claps, tambourines and oooh-ing vocals — with the brainy ambition of a guy who's spent his life studying dusty 45s. Nearly every track on this 30-minute disc sounds instantly familiar, like the best cut from a 10-year-old mix tape you found buried in a shoebox. Morrissey would surely auction his quiff to write a wistful stomper like "There and Back Again." The playing throughout, swathed in Phil Spector-esque guitar buzz, is unfussy and even amateurish, but Angergård's compositions are fool-proof, shimmering with classic pop DNA. In an alternate universe, Diana Ross could've taken "Nothing to Be Done" to No. 1.

ROSS RAIHALA

DOWNLOAD: "There and Back Again," "Everything You Say," "The Kids Just Wanna Have Fun"

LOW

THE GREAT DESTROYER

★★★★

SUB POP

Rock's quietest band smash their own formula, loudly

QUIET BAND GETS LOUD

For over a decade, Low have been into the darkness, exploring the lower extremities of volume and speed. This time, though, they've turned it up — way up. When they hit the squealing peaks of most of these songs, you can hear Alan Sparhawk's guitar amp trembling from the distortion, and Mimi Parker plows into her drums as she never has before. Amazingly, though, *The Great Destroyer* still moves like Low's earlier music, slow-paced and fragile, with Sparhawk and Parker's tender-like-a-wound harmonies hovering above the sonic and emotional carnage: "What, pray tell, will save you now?" they croon on "Cue the Strings." It's the boldest album of their career, a well-earned embrace of the force-fulness they once defined themselves by rejecting.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Monkey," "When I Go Deaf" →

LCD Soundsystem: "OK, so I don't know how to set up a drum kit."

Tim Soter

DISCO TECH

The coolest man in NYC makes an album about being cool

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

★★★★½

DFA

AS CO-FOUNDER of New York's painfully hip label DFA, James Murphy of LCD Soundsystem specializes in fusing dance groove and punk attack. DFA's trademark sound made waves in 2002 with the Rapture's jagged "House of Jealous Lovers," which Murphy co-produced. Next came the first LCD single, "Losing My Edge," the hilarious lament of an aging hipster who feels eclipsed by youngsters with even more esoteric reference points.

Included here on a bonus CD that gathers three early singles, "Losing" sets the template for much of this debut full-length. Several of the best tunes are inspired by Murphy's love-hate relationship with music: his struggle between wanting to be cool and feeling the impulse is loathsome, between his attachment to rock's heritage and his urge to rip it up and start again. Out of these clashing emotions emerges a prime contender for Best Album of 2005.

Murphy weaves together sounds from the last 25 years of dance music, with a slant towards early-'80s mutant disco — spiky Gang of Four guitar, punkily funky bass — and recent house and hip-hop. "Too Much Love," a brilliantly eerie song about overdoing the party potions, pivots around a grating synth that whimpers like a burned-out brain, while "Thrills" rides an utterly contemporary groove inspired by Missy Elliott's "Get Ur Freak On."

Murphy pushes the near-immaculate music into the realm of genius with witty lyrics and wonderfully tetchy vocals. "On Repeat" expresses the ennui of a seasoned scenester, while "Movement" is a feedback-laced diatribe about modern music: "It's like a movement, without the bother of all of the meaning." The dry, irritable texture of his voice suits the themes of exhaustion and exasperation. He adds a cute David-Byrne-doing-Al-Green falsetto to "Disco Infiltrator" and resurrects the serenity of Brian Eno's early solo albums on the closing "Great Release."

LCD PUSH INTO THE REALM OF GENIUS.

Spotting these sources is bonus fun, but the glory of LCD Soundsystem is the way the music sounds like an entity, not a collage. All its influences meld to form a seductive — if clearly deeply conflicted — self.

SIMON REYNOLDS

DOWNLOAD: "Too Much Love," "Movement," "Thrills"

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CROSS INTO THE BLUE

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MASTODON

LEVIATHAN ✪✪✪✪

RELAPSE

Underground metal throwbacks stomp nimbly into the history of heavy

HEAVY AS RUBEN STUDDARD

Mastodon play as if metal never lost the "heavy" prefix. They devote their second album to a song-cycle about Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, a notion that seems ripped from some long-lost Led Zeppelin notepad. The Atlanta quartet decide what's been durable in the history of hard rock and consolidate it into one walloping group sound, a collection of harmonies, rhythms, riffs and textures from Neurosis to Alice in Chains to Metallica to Sabbath to Zep to (no kidding) the Beatles. (A second disc includes several tunes in 5.1 surround sound.) Smart, serious, densely composed, shredding and grooving and elegiac by turns, *Leviathan* needs a few listens before it can be absorbed; when it does, it can become ambrosial.

BEN RATLIFF

DOWNLOAD: "Blood and Thunder," "Aqua Dementia," "Joseph Merrick"

OL' DIRTY BASTARD

OSIRUS ✪✪✪

JC/SURE SHOT

The Wu-Tang Clan's tragic jester gets the posthumous treatment

Assembled by O.D.B.'s mother, Cherry Jones, from unreleased studio takes, *Osirus* closely mirrors the troubled rapper's final years before his sudden collapse at age 35, late in 2004: It's unpredictable, occasionally inspired, "more gritty than giddy" and there's barely a Wu-Tang clansman in sight. The concrete funk of "Pop Shots" – produced by DJ Premier – and the RZA-indebted "Dirty Dirty" and "High in the Clouds" capture the rapper's soiled charisma and blustery, off-kilter wails. But the disc – not to be confused with his upcoming album for Roc-A-Fella – is overwhelmed by inconsistent production and so many C-list cameos that O.D.B. often sounds like a guest at his own party.

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD: "High in the Clouds," "Dirty Dirty"

PITTY SING

PITTY SING ✪✪✪

OR

Too young to remember *The Breakfast Club*? That didn't stop this lot.

Looking like extras from *The O.C.* by way of *Pretty in Pink*, these four dropouts from Boston's muso factory the Berklee College of Music won't rest until they've surfed the '80s wave out of the fashion ghetto and into the mainstream. The plan is simple: Smash U2 guitar licks into Depeche Mode keyboard lines while U.K.-born singer Paul Holmes swoons in a serious, ambisexual way (even muscling into Morrissey territory on the well-titled "We're on Drugs") while Dave Greenwald's jock-rocking drums lay waste to the authentically '80s aura of high-school-poet pretentiousness. With its hurricane chorus, "Radio" is the likely hit (radio loves songs about radio), here with its naughty "Fuck on the radio" refrain restored (radio hates songs that say "fuck"). All told: slick, dramatic fun.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD: "Radio," "Hanging on Me"

LEANN RIMES

THIS WOMAN ✪✪✪✪

CURB

Country princess or AOR superstar? Dazzling Southern singer wanders through the best of both worlds

Which woman, exactly? The one who caught Patsy Cline in a bottle and went multi-platinum at age 13? Or

IT'S A SMALL WORLD

Fat-bottomed revolution rap from a London fly girl

M.I.A.

ARULAR ✪✪✪✪

XL

LET'S HEAR IT for rap's barbarians. It's always the off-the-map weirdos – from N.W.A to Missy Elliott to Lil Jon – who defy rap's provincialism and punk, funk and crunk up the landscape. Slender, beautiful and so fashionable she makes Madonna seem like Diana DeGarmo, Maya Arulpragasam, 28, doesn't look like a barbarian, but she makes music like one.

The Sri Lankan–born, London-bred MC calls her debut a "sketchbook of marginal sounds," but "breathless house party with every one of the world's hippest dance cultures" is closer to it. Interwoven here are the bee-in-a-vocoder synths and bootful-of-gravel drums of British grime; the gulping tablas of Indian *bhangra*; the cramped rhythms of Jamaican dancehall; and the 808 bass fetish of Brazilian *baile* funk. M.I.A. raps over these twitters and eruptions in cool, deadened tones, occasionally vaulting up into hooky chirps.

The single is "Galang," a stomp of decaying drums, petty crime drama and an adhesive gibberish refrain. With obvious differences (she raps, not sings), she's oddly reminiscent of Aaliyah, who glided and shadowboxed over treacherous Timbaland terrain.

With her immigrant childhood – a Tamil, the besieged minority in Sri Lanka's civil war, she fled at age 10 – it makes sense that M.I.A. champions the marginalized. From a "pull up the poor" chant to PLO shout-outs to tales of paranoid drug dealers, the dance floor is her soapbox.

But it doesn't feel like soapboxing; it feels like life, and that's her biggest contribution to hip-hop. She isn't joylessly polemical, doesn't devote one token track to politics before returning to the club. She protests the whole party through, evoking parts of the world where anger, revolution and enjoying yourself regardless are the realities of lives spent dodging bullets and scrambling for food – whether it's Compton or Colombo.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD: "Pull Up the People," "Galang," "Bucky Done Gun"

M.I.A.'S CURRENT LISTENING:

DOCK BOGGS, COUNTRY BLUES: COMPLETE EARLY RECORDINGS *REVENANT*

ROY BUDD, WHO DARES WINS: ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK *VARESE SARABANDE*

Hey, M.I.A., Peg Bundy called: She wants her pants back.

David Titlow

the one who defected to generic chart-pop in 2002? At 22, Rimes is now a little of this and a little of that, draggin' the line between Nashville pop and the tradlands in search of a home for her freaky-magnificent vocal chops. Resisting the temptation to oversing or to polish her songs until there's nothing left but gloss, Rimes puts together an incoherent, appealing string of possible singles – squalling guitar here, fiddle 'n' banjo there, big 'n' rich melodies everywhere. It could be a greatest-hits package for a lesser light, or an experiment in not choosing a direction: hillbilly bop hauled downtown, or a hot child in the country.

RENE VIENET

DOWNLOAD: "Nothin' Bout Love Makes Sense," "I Want to With You," "I Got It Bad"

ROCKET SCIENCE

ETERNAL HOLIDAY ✪✪✪

MODULAR

Better late than never, it's (the Australian) Iggy and the Stooges!

It's like a punk-rock fairytale. This Australian mob's singer, Roman Tucker, cracked his head at a party and emerged from the resultant four-day coma with no memory of having made his new album. Must have been a nice surprise for him, then: This third record is beefier than its predecessor, *Contact High*, with former White Stripes producer Jim Diamond fattening out Rocket Science's spidery riffs and helping the band grope toward their ideal of a late-'60s idiot-geek punk mess for the 21st century. There's one tempo (breakneck) and the band believe in guitar as blunt instrument all the way, but Tucker's keyboard abuse and some oddly sweet harmonies add bags of teeth-grinding character.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD: "Too Tough to Care," "Modern Life," "Sex Call"

RICHIE SPICE

SPICE IN YOUR LIFE ✪✪✪✪

FIFTH ELEMENT

Stunning set of spiritual reggae tunes avoids the excesses of piety

Conscious artists like Richie Spice toe a fine line. The wrong approach turns righteous to self-righteous faster than you can strap on a backpack. But this Rastafarian singer proves the right approach is a matter of attitude – or lack thereof. His lyrics, didactic as a schoolmarm ("Watch the places you walk/and mind the way you talk"), feel radiant because there's not an arrogant note in his voice. Spice's second album – a flawless contrast of plain, wailing vocals and intricately crafted instrumentals – deserves to internationalize his cult-like following. He earnestly laments Jamaica's ghetto youth ("Earth a Run Red," "Crying Out for Love"), makes self-help mantras sound novel ("Check Yourself") – and ultimately achieves the implausible: He makes saintliness more enthralling than sin.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD: "Check Yourself," "Earth a Run Red," "Outta the Blue"

Richie Spice: "I and I like to play cat's cradle."

TINARIWEN

AMASSAKOUL ✪✪✪✪

WORLD VILLAGE

African nomads play electric music for long desert nights.

BLENDER'S FAVE WORLD-MUSIC CD

"I am a traveler in the lone desert/It's nothing special," sings Ibrahim Al Alhabib in the Tamascheck language of his Touareg tribe. The lines kick off an album destined for the upper reaches of most international-music mavens' top-10 lists, because Tinariwen's music – part provocation, part trance – is special, with a romantic and revolutionary backstory to boot. While in exile during their tribe's rebellion against Mali's government, the formerly acoustic band developed a unique take on the West Africa–seeded electric blues that emerged from the Mississippi Delta. Hypnotic loping guitars shuffle against syncopated clapping, *djembe* drums and female ululation in songs about life on the dusty road, exasperation with tribal capitulations to modernity and the trouble with camels.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD: "Oulahila Ar Tesninam," "Alkhar Dessouf"

TREMBLING BLUE STARS

THE SEVEN AUTUMN FLOWERS ✪✪✪

BAR/NONE

Brit mope-rock auteur is still sad after all these years

Bob Wratten sings about depression as if he's the first guy to ever experience it. It's not that he's arrogant or ignorant; there's just a certain guileless charm to his navel-gazing that has allowed him to sustain a 17-year career. On his fifth Trembling Blue Stars disc, Wratten offers up a dozen painstakingly detailed songs (plus four bonus tracks) about breaking up with your girlfriend, feeling blue and (as far as we can tell) hugging your cat – all delivered over a folk-rock bed of guitar, strings and subtle electronic flourishes, aided sonically by Saint Etienne engineer Ian Catt. Austere in its beauty and a little wearying, *Autumn Flowers* makes us wonder if a blog wouldn't be a better outlet for Wratten's torments.

ROSS RAIHALA

DOWNLOAD: "Moonlight on Snow," "The Sea Is So Quiet"

UNWRITTEN LAW

HERE'S TO THE MOURNING ✪✪

LAVA

Goofy SoCal quintet goes glum, cranks amps back to 11

Pop-punk survivors Unwritten Law haven't just jumped on the emo bandwagon, they've become one of its squeakiest wheels. Having found their sensitive sides on 2003's acoustic *Music in High Places* – and a taste of mainstream success the year before with the blaring chart flare "Seein' Red" – the band softens their sixth album with dolorously sung lyrics like "Had a bad day/Don't talk to me" ("Save Me") only to jolt anyone who's still listening with head-battering whine-metal choruses. (Those lulled into purchasing or downloading by the initially featherlight "She Says" are in for a particular shock.) They're at their most original in the Beatles-rip roundup "Walrus," whose unburdened blitheness is a relief. But discovering the Beatles 10 years into your career: Not a good sign.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD: "Walrus"

BLENDER APPROVED

The best new releases of the past few months

THE ARCADE FIRE

FUNERAL

MERGE

Indie-rock weirdos with more buzz than an Army barbershop unveil a rich, layered debut that's among '04's best CDs.

EMINEM

ENCORE

SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE

On his fourth CD, rap's introspective superstar cracks poop jokes, bitch-slaps the President and generally loses himself.

LIL JON AND THE EASTSIDE BOYZ

CRUNK JUICE

TVT

Catchy funk from the dude with the hottest three-word vocabulary since the "Where's the beef?" lady.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

OFFICIAL SOUNDTRACK

ROCKSTAR/INTERSCOPE

From James Brown and Skynyrd to Tupac and Soundgarden: a day's worth of music to kill hookers to.

I LOVE THIS CD!

JESSICA BIEL

ACTRESS, *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE, BLADE: TRINITY*

DAMIEN RICE

O

VECTOR

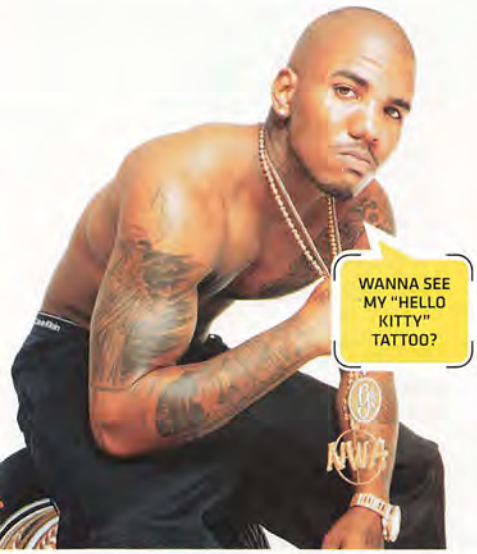
"It's melancholy, and I like how his voice sounds. I love how mellow and sad it is. It's very soothing to listen to."

Biel: Lee Celano/Wireimage.com; Spice: Marlon "Ajamu" Myrie

THE

40 MOST POPULAR SONGS IN AMERICA

A COMPTON HUSTLER BEATS OUT DUBLIN'S — AND DETROIT'S — FINEST



POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"HOW WE DO"	THE GAME	*THE DOCUMENTARY* G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE
2	"ALL BECAUSE OF YOU"	U2	*HOW TO DISMANTLE AN ATOMIC BOMB* INTERSCOPE
3	"ENCORE"	EMINEM	*ENCORE* SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE
4	"CAUGHT UP"	USHER	*CONFESSIONS* LAFACE
5	"LIVE LIKE YOU WERE DYING"	TIM MCGRAW	*LIVE LIKE YOU WERE DYING* CURB
6	"OVER AND OVER"	NELLY FEAT. TIM MCGRAW	*SUIT* FO' REEL/UNIVERSAL
7	"NUMB/ENCORE"	JAY-Z/LINKIN PARK	*COLLISION COURSE* WARNER BROS.
8	"BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS"	GREEN DAY	*AMERICAN IDIOT* REPRISE
9	"SOLDIER"	DESTINY'S CHILD	*DESTINY FULFILLED* COLUMBIA
10	"SINCE U BEEN GONE"	KELLY CLARKSON	*BREAKAWAY* RCA
11	"DISAPPEAR"	HOOBASTANK	*THE REASON* ISLAND
12	"RICH GIRL"	GWEN STEFANI FEAT. EVE	*LOVE ANGEL MUSIC BABY* INTERSCOPE
13	"LET ME LOVE YOU"	MARIO	*TURNING POINT* J RECORDS
14	"DROP IT LIKE IT'S HOT"	SNOOP DOGG	*R&G (RHYTHM & GANGSTA)* DOGGYSTYLE/STAR TRAK/GEFFEN
15	"GET BACK"	LUDACRIS	*THE RED LIGHT DISTRICT* DEF JAM SOUTH
16	"ONLY U"	ASHANTI	*CONCRETE ROSE* THE INC./DEF JAM
17	"NOBODY'S HOME"	AVRIL LAVIGNE	*UNDER MY SKIN* ARISTA
18	"1,2 STEP"	CIARA	*GOODIES* LAFACE
19	"I'M NOT OK (I PROMISE)"	MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE	*THREE CHEERS FOR SWEET REVENGE* REPRISE
20	"DAUGHTERS"	JOHN MAYER	*HEAVIER THINGS* AWARE/COLUMBIA
21	"BRING EM OUT"	T.I.	*URBAN LEGEND* ATLANTIC
22	"MR. BRIGHTSIDE"	THE KILLERS	*HOT FUSS* ISLAND
23	"PARTY FOR TWO"	SHANIA TWAIN	*GREATEST HITS* MERCURY NASHVILLE
24	"OVER"	LINDSAY LOHAN	*SPEAK* CASABLANCA/UNIVERSAL
25	"SUNDAY MORNING"	MAROON 5	*SONGS ABOUT JANE* OCTONE/J RECORDS
26	"LOVERS & FRIENDS"	LIL JON	*CRUNK JUICE* TVT
27	"LADY"	LENNY KRAVITZ	*BAPTISM* VIRGIN
28	"KARMA"	ALICIA KEYS	*THE DIARY OF ALICIA KEYS* J RECORDS
29	"I JUST WANNA LIVE"	GOOD CHARLOTTE	*THE CHRONICLES OF LIFE AND DEATH* EPIC
30	"BEAUTIFUL SOUL"	JESSE MCCARTNEY	*BEAUTIFUL SOUL* HOLLYWOOD
31	"WELCOME TO MY LIFE"	SIMPLE PLAN	*STILL NOT GETTING ANY* LAVA
32	"HOME"	THREE DAYS GRACE	*THREE DAYS GRACE* JIVE
33	"VERTIGO"	U2	*HOW TO DISMANTLE AN ATOMIC BOMB* INTERSCOPE
34	"MY BOO"	USHER/ALICA KEYS	*CONFESSIONS* LAFACE
35	"BLOOD RED SUMMER"	COHEED AND CAMBRIA	*IN KEEPING SECRETS . . .* EQUAL VISION/COLUMBIA
36	"RIGHT TO BE WRONG"	JOSS STONE	*MIND BODY AND SOUL* S-CURVE
37	"ALMOST"	BOWLING FOR SOUP	*A HANGOVER YOU DON'T DESERVE* JIVE
38	"BABY IT'S YOU"	JOJO	*JOJO* BLACKGROUND/UNIVERSAL
39	"OCEAN BREATHES SALTY"	MODEST MOUSE	*GOOD NEWS FOR . . .* EPIC
40	"PRESSURE POINT"	THE ZUTONS	*WHO KILLED . . . THE ZUTONS?* DELTASONIC/EPIC

1

THE GAME

"HOW WE DO"

THE DOCUMENTARY

This G-Unit gangsta, who has an Eazy-E tattoo on his arm and a bullet wound in his heart, makes 50 Cent look as tough as a crossing guard. If seeing the video on MTV and BET 20 times a day still doesn't satisfy your West Coast hip-hop jones, cop the Game's new *The Documentary* DVD, out now.

HOW WE DID IT

The Most Popular Songs chart is based on radio and video airplay and album sales. Provided by HITSDailyDouble.com: "Proof that any idiot in the music business can have a Web site."

12

GWEN STEFANI FEAT. EVE

"RICH GIRL"

LOVE ANGEL MUSIC BABY

Is the No Doubt singer's solo debut a giddy '80s dance party or a crass promotional tie-in with her L.A.M.B. clothing line? Both! And if her gigs as former ska princess turned synth-pop maven and fashion designer aren't enough for you, you can catch her in an entirely different role, playing '40s Hollywood starlet Jean Harlow in Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator*.

MARIO

"LET ME LOVE YOU"

TURNING POINT

The 18-year-old R&B crooner can barely get into an R-rated movie without his mom, but this sultry slow jam has ladies thrice his age lining up to let him love them. Catch him as he takes his weapons of mass seduction on tour later this spring. (Rumors of a Luigi cameo are unconfirmed.)

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE

"I'M NOT OK (I PROMISE)"

THREE CHEERS FOR SWEET REVENGE

SCRAARGHRAAAGH!! Sorry, just doing an impression of this screamy pop-punk unit. With heavy video play on MTV and MTV2 and a fiery January Letterman performance under their white belts, the New Jersey fivesome set out on the Taste of Chaos national tour this month, joined on the bill by fellow throat-destroyers the Used.

Clockwise from top: Courtesy of J Records; Courtesy of Reprise; Courtesy of G-Unit/Interscope

NOT ALL LITTLE BLACK BAGS HAVE STETHOSCOPES.

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"Bow before the dark power of my sparkly bathrobe!"

Joseph Cultice/Corbis Outline

THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC

Trent Reznor's carnal freak show crashed industrial fury into the Top 40

NINE INCH NAILS
THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

✪✪✪✪

INTERSCOPE/UNIVERSAL CHRONICLES

ADOLESCENCE IS INDUSTRIAL. Some days you're a pretty hate machine. But mostly you're an ugly factory, filled to the filters with fresh hormones and stale desires, glossy images and matte-black moods, social contempt and absurd rules. Your body is always at work, converting all this into something awful, something that builds up inside with enough pressure to burst a steel balloon.

That's where Nine Inch Nails come in. They're the counterforce.

Foremost a phantom of Trent Reznor, a tiny singer with chalk skin, lank locks and Cleveland roots, NIN took industrial music to the masses. Like grunge, industrial was a backlash against the lite that had befallen hard rock in the '80s. But, while Nirvana played the flannel card, NIN flew the PVC and admitted they loved their computers, OK? Leaving cult purity to comrades Ministry and Skinny Puppy, Reznor flounced like Captain Hooktastic, reinventing the genre as gothic glam.

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL IS A FACTORY OF REPRESSED FURY.

Such stylings didn't come without snickers. From 1989's debut *Pretty Hate Machine* and on, scoffers suggested NIN was sellout-soft, too wedded to pop pleasures and sonic perfectionism, little more than angst you could dance to.

How hardcore could a guy be who fonged Courtney Love and befriended Tori Amos? But that's exactly it. *The Downward Spiral*, recorded in the L.A. house where the Manson Family killed five people, abandoned the genre's iron heaviosity for less blunt instruments. The album was like an instruction manual on the uses of a new metal, exceeding the competition in alloying elements of black-clad white youth: the spectral, the feminine, the pretty and the broken. (The follow-up, five years later, would be called *The Fragile* and recorded in a *funeral parlor* — awesome! — though by then the reclusive Reznor was largely known as Marilyn Manson's enabler.)

And what the hell is wrong with angst you can dance to? From the moment the opener, "Mr. Self Destruct," coalesces into an inhuman march, to the loathing strains of "Hurt" (the desolate dope epic that the older Man in Black, Johnny Cash, later covered for his farewell masterpiece), the album throws up a factory's worth of repressed fury: clattering beats über alles, howls digitized to the edge of intelligibility and a wobbly piano creeping into the crevices like a baroque ghost.

The spikes and dynamics, yowls and quiet breaks are symptoms of the same contradiction: "This world is too hideous for me. I am too hideous for this world." Reznor's best songs take both sides of the contradiction at once: the curdled refusals of "I Do Not Want This" lead immediately to first-person shooter "Big Man With a Gun." Tingly "March of the Pigs" starts with an eccentric rhythm and then spasms through creepy rage and creepier resignation: The shifts are as baffling as a 16-year-old's moods, even the moments of sweetness edged with shit.

Reznor is so committed to this impure vision that this rerelease lacks any bonus tracks or remixes to disturb the structure. The flip side DVD includes video clips fans will recognize, all stylized shock cuts and Moviola S&M.

Such obsessions can't help but return us to the disc's most famous song: the perfectly unrepressed "Closer." That smash's tagline — "I want to fuck you like an animal" — isn't just sexed-up; it's the very image of something awful and desperate to burst. But the sound hammers right back in at you, exactly as hard as the furious pressure wants to break out. Like sniffing glue or cutting yourself, *The Downward Spiral* is only a temporary tactic in the strategies of youth, sound and the fury meeting each other in a tenuous balance that equalized the pressure for a little while 10 years ago, the sound of a million kids holding off an explosion. *RENE VIENET*

DOWNLOAD: "Closer," "March of the Pigs"

THE SCORE >>

✪✪✪✪✪ A CLASSIC

✪✪✪✪ GREAT

✪✪✪ GOOD

✪✪ MEDIOCRE

✪ FOUL

THE BRIAN JONESTOWN MASSACRE

TEPID PEPPERMINT WONDERLAND ✪✪

TEEPEE

Some rock stars are junkies, but not all junkies are rock stars

The only thing keeping Brian Jonestown Massacre leader Anton Newcombe from becoming a massive rock star is his music. This 10-year, two-CD retrospective of the San Francisco band wants to capitalize on his newfound notoriety as the star of *Dig!*, last year's nearly-impossible-to-believe documentary about Newcombe's ongoing feuds with the Dandy Warhols, the music industry and the world at large. The film's testimonials from fellow musicians and industry middleweights suggest that Newcombe is a cult icon on the order of Roky Erickson and Syd Barrett. But strip away the ranting, bad behavior and outright megalomania and you're left with BJM's poorly written and recorded garage-band tributes to the Velvet Underground and Pink Floyd. Buy *Dig!* on DVD instead.

JACK HAYES

DOWNLOAD: "Servo," "The Ballad of Jim Jones"

BURNING SPEAR

CREATION REBEL: THE ORIGINAL CLASSIC RECORDINGS FROM STUDIO ONE ✪✪✪✪

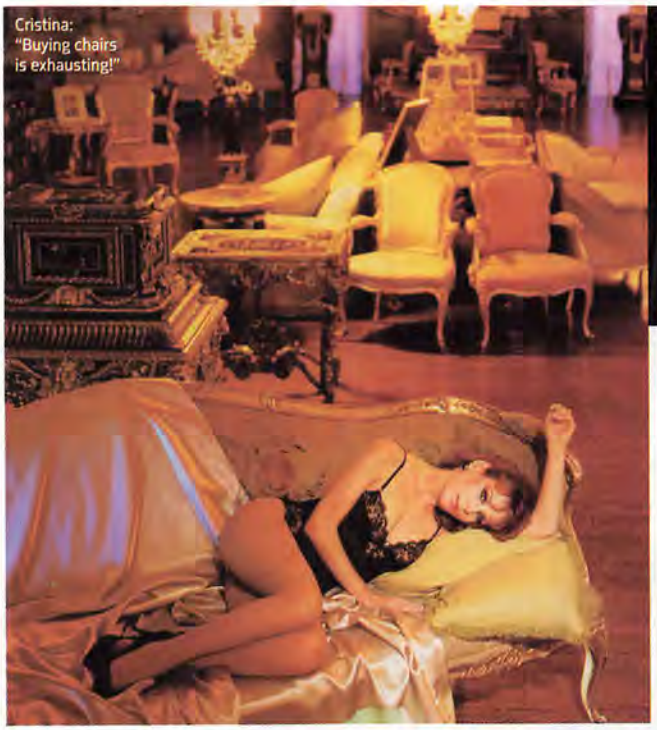
HEARTBEAT

The first recordings by reggae's second most vital voice

In 1969, reggae gold standard Bob Marley introduced the late, influential Studio One producer Clement Dodd to 21-year-old Winston Rodney, better known as Burning Spear. Rodney's first recordings almost singlehandedly mark reggae's transition from the buttoned-down rock-steady style to the revolution-advocating, ganja-inhaling sound of the '70s. With the thoroughly pessimistic "Bad to Worst" and the blissful yet ghostly "Call On You," Spear's already old-as-the-hills voice condemns racial injustice while advocating a "new civilization" over a spare drum and bass foundation with sly organ accents. This isn't Spear's best album; that would be 1975's *Marcus Garvey*. But the roots-reggae rebellion, in its smoky splendor, starts here.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD: "Foggy Road," "Call On You"



Cristina: "Buying chairs is exhausting!"

CRISTINA

DOLL IN THE BOX ✪✪✪

SLEEP IT OFF ✪✪✪✪

ZE

Two overdue reissues from a forgotten New Wave nymphet

Flaunting an off-pitch voice that ranged from deadpan squeak to deadpan drone, the stunning Cristina Monet was a swanky-seedy nymphet who released only two flop albums but left a stiletto-heel imprint on New York's post-punk underground. Masterminded by August Darnell (a.k.a. Caribbean-funk king Kid Creole), *Doll in the Box* (1980) spikes big-band disco with gimmicky tropicalia. From the rich-bitch punk anthem "Don't Mutilate My Mink" to the contemptuous high-society torch song "He Dines Out on Death," her final album, *Sleep It Off* (1984) personifies an unfortunately rare genre: ironic New Wave cabaret. The best among numerous bonus tracks and remixes: a superbly blank cover of the Beatles' "Drive My Car," a furious version of Peggy Lee's wrist-slashing lament "Is That All There Is?" and an original lost classic, "Things Fall Apart," the *Bad Santa* of Christmas songs.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: "Drive My Car," "Don't Mutilate My Mink," "He Dines Out on Death," "Is That All There Is?"

Brian Jonestown Massacre: Just a little farther back, guys . . . .

Miles Davis: "Parp!"

MILES DAVIS

A TRIBUTE TO JACK JOHNSON ✪✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Trumpet visionary radicalized staid jazz with wild rock guitars

A JAZZ-ROCK GREAT

When he plugged in his band in the late 1960s, Miles Davis became the ultimate bandleader-as-chemist, combining volatile agents for intense reactions. *Jack Johnson*, recorded in 1969 and 1970, starts its two cuts (each originally an LP side) with rudiments: a one-chord blues shuffle in "Right Off" and a lope-and-pause bassline in "Yesternow." But with Davis in the room, nobody ever took it easy. John McLaughlin's electric guitar chomps and slashes in the savage "Right Off" and shadows Davis's trumpet jabs with sly wah-wah asides in "Yesternow," which detours into some viciously spacey funk topped by Herbie Hancock's splintery keyboards. The music is angry, haunted, wide open and furiously concentrated, determined to make every note cut deeper.

JON PARELES

DOWNLOAD: "Right Off"

ENON

LOST MARBLES AND EXPLODED EVIDENCE ✪✪✪

TOUCH AND GO

New York synth anti-pop group tidies up its archives, but not too tidily

From electro shuffles to punk vamps, this compilation of singles and other odd tracks is something of a jumble, which is exactly how the New York combo likes it. Originally just singer-guitarist-synthist John Schmersal, Enon have evolved into a smart, unpredictable trio, featuring Toko Yasuda's lovely coo. Recorded between 1998 and 2004, these 16 tunes are all short and mostly machine-generated, but range widely in mood and timbre. Yasuda harmonizes with herself atop the chiming riffs and fuzz-bass pulses of "Knock That Door," while Schmersal rants over harsh bleeps and heavy thumps on "Marbles Explode." ➔

Cristina: Guy Bourdin; Davis: Tom Terrill

Having his breakfast stolen was the last straw for R.E.M.'s Bill Berry.

THE MAJOR LEAGUE

The greatest American rock band of the last 20 years, ready for prime time

R.E.M.

GREEN ✪✪✪

OUT OF TIME ✪✪✪✪

AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE ✪✪✪✪✪

MONSTER ✪✪✪

NEW ADVENTURES IN HI-FI ✪✪

UP ✪✪✪✪

REVEAL ✪✪

IN TIME: THE BEST OF R.E.M. ✪✪✪✪

AROUND THE SUN ✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

FOR ROCK FANS, there is no greater misery than a beloved cult act hitting it big. Bob Dylan went electric 40 years ago, and folkies who remember him tootling away in Greenwich Village cellars are *still* seething.

In alternative rock, the defining betrayal of the past 20 years is R.E.M.'s jump to a major label. For most of the '80s, R.E.M. led a gradually coalescing college-radio movement. Their early albums on the hipster I.R.S. label invented a new vocabulary: Michael Stipe's lyrics, slurred and cryptic, defied the sloganeering of arena rock, and Pete Buck's guitar style, garagey and evasive, offered an antidote to macho posturing.

Their 1983 album debut, *Murmur*, was a critics' smash, weird enough to unite slackers and misfits. R.E.M. were a great band, but the reason people loved them was that they *weren't* popular, at least by Madonna standards. Then, after their first top 10 hit, "The One I Love," they jumped to Warner Bros., music's largest label. R.E.M. were moving away from their fans and giving themselves to the world.

IN THE '90S, R.E.M. GAVE THEMSELVES TO THE WORLD

It's almost absurd to explain the pain caused by this move. One disillusioned fan felt so betrayed that she went 10 years without playing an R.E.M. album. It's the fan writing this review.

Well, boo-hoo-hoo: R.E.M.'s move played out brilliantly. They sold a million copies of their first Warners album, *Green*, released in 1989, and 4 million each of the next two. R.E.M. became standard-bearers of American rock. Before, R.E.M. had communicated with the isolated; now they communed with a vast humanity.

Spoilsports, licking their wounds, watched from the sidelines and snickered. "Shiny Happy People"? What a stupid song! The "Losing My Religion" video? Stipe's dancing like an idiot! In 1997, drummer Bill Berry quit and it was about time — R.E.M. had sucked since *Fables*! Rock knoweth no fury like a fan scorned.

With Warners reissuing its R.E.M. catalogue, it's time for whiners to admit they overreacted. (The CD/DVD twin packs offer remixed sound and interview footage but no bonus tracks or B-sides.) Each album has its rewards. *Green* has preachy songs about agent orange ("Orange Crush") and bad politicians ("World Leader Pretend"), but the band is taut and Buck's guitar has new bite; the single "Stand" is riotously, infectiously inane.

Out of Time (1991) is the finest expression of R.E.M.'s folk side, with mandolin and harpsichord; "Near Wild Heaven," a Beach Boys paean sung by bassist Mike Mills, is a hidden gem. *Automatic* (1992) abounds with beauty. "Sweetness Follows" comforts a friend coping with death, amid an overlay of cello, organ and guitar feedback. "Find the River" is so rife with gentle melancholy, Karen Carpenter could have sung it. *Monster* (1994), R.E.M.'s big-rock statement, is monotonous, but also pleasingly, punkishly loud — especially when Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth deadpan-vocalizes on "Crush With Eyeliner."

After that, things get weird. *New Adventures in Hi-Fi* (1996) has wild, experimental sounds: high-anxiety keyboards, low guitar groans, rhythmless synthesizer wheezes. But the lyrics read like a trip through someone's bottoming-out period, and Mills's harmonies are missing in action.

Up (1998) is their first album as a trio, and their most intimate in years. Stipe's vocals, strident before, are hesitant, almost apologetic; the homey keyboard arrangements are warm and inviting. Upended by Berry's departure, R.E.M. risked vulnerability, to winning effect. *Reveal* (2001), on the other hand, just sounds like Euro-lounge: lovely sonic textures, boring songs.

In Time: The Best of R.E.M. (2003) is a dandy shortcut through this territory. The DVD includes the video for last year's single, "Bad Day," in which Stipe, Buck and Mills impersonate a morning news team. It's *scary* how well they impersonate a morning news team; Stipe has the vacant, quizzical gaze down pat. The song itself is a throwback, a jittery uptempo number with a circa-'83 guitar riff and insistent backbeat. The lyrics are a glorious jumble; it takes several listens to sort out the meanings: This bad day, it seems, began when George W. Bush was elected. It's the old R.E.M. again: joyful, danceable, subtly political.

Best of all, the song wasn't even a hit. *KAREN SCHOEMER*

DOWNLOAD: "Me in Honey," "The Sidewinder Sleeps Tonight," "Bad Day," "Crush With Eyeliner," "Daysleeper"

Keith Carter/Warner Bros.

Bono's Riverdance routine was short-lived.

U-TUNES

The Complete U2 on iTunes covers some 400 different songs: That's 2GB of memory, almost 34 hours of music. *Blender* sifts through to pick out the most interesting rare songs. You will follow!

1 "STREET MISSIONS"
(FIRST DEMO VERSION)
1978
Want to hear how much U2 owed to N.Y. punk rock? From their first real demo session, this unconvincing tale of alienation and urban danger sounds like audition night at CBGB. They were still more than a year away from getting signed. [PU]

2 "11 O'CLOCK TICK TOCK"
1980
Not so much a song as a snake-headed guitar riff with some distressed lyrics tacked on, U2's third single never appeared on an album, though it was a live staple as late as 2001's *Elevation* tour. [45]

3 "I WILL FOLLOW"
(LIVE AT PARADISE THEATRE)
1981
"Up on your feet!" Bono commands with typical conviction. Live version of a rippling track about faith and commitment, and U2's first great song, taken from a widely-bootlegged Boston radio broadcast. [L]

4 "A CELEBRATION" (SINGLE)
1982
Stroked by one of the spiky riffs that made the Edge a guitar hero, Bono mixes Biblical imagery with shouted instructions to dance and the self-belief that would make U2 the world's biggest rock band: "I believe in the powers that be/But they won't overpower me." [45]

5 "JESUS CHRIST"
(FROM THE SUN SESSIONS FOR *RATTLE AND HUM*)
1988
Their late-'80s infatuation with Southern R&B led these Irish boys into some ridiculous positions, but this jumped-up rockabilly shuffle shows how well they cribbed from Johnny Cash's religious music. [PU]

6 "GOD PART TWO"
(LIVE AT THE POINT DEPOT)
1989
At the peak of their fame — and egomania — U2 entertain a home-town crowd on New Year's Eve. Bono is as breathy as a porn star as he channels John Lennon in this *Rattle and Hum* track: hostile, nasty, contradictory. [L]

7 "TWO SHOTS OF HAPPY, ONE SHOT OF SAD"
1997
A bluesy saloon song brashly written for Frank Sinatra — who was too busy covering "Bridge Over Troubled Water" to record it. It's flush with cheek, strings and boozy wisdom, and U2 used it as a *Pop* B-side. [B]

8 "FLOWER CHILD"
(FROM *ALL THAT YOU CAN'T LEAVE BEHIND* SESSIONS)
2000
A giddy tale about youthfulness and being smitten. The loping acoustic guitar and hippie-ish chorus ("You grow wild in my heart") are offset by spooky keyboard tones full of loneliness. [PU]

9 "LEVITATE"
(FROM *ALL THAT YOU CAN'T LEAVE BEHIND* SESSIONS)
2000
"No, I'm not coming down," Bono insists in this previously unreleased track about the struggle for uplift, which sounds like *The Joshua Tree* with an added layer of electronic crust. [PU]

10 "SMILE"
(FROM *HOW TO DISMANTLE AN ATOMIC BOMB* SESSIONS)
2004
A gorgeous and bittersweet breakup ballad, gentle as a heartache, which Bono decorates with falsetto hoots. Why wasn't this on the album? [PU]

11 "XANAX AND WINE"
(FROM *HOW TO DISMANTLE AN ATOMIC BOMB* SESSIONS)
2004
Joyful, distorted garage-rock guitar from the Edge, with rapid surreal nonsense ("They're in the desert to dismantle an atomic bomb") tumbling from Bono's never-ending mouth. Concept: See title. [PU]

ROB TANNENBAUM

ICON KEY

[L] LIVE	[45] EARLY SINGLE, NEVER ON CD
[PU] PREVIOUSLY UNRELEASED	[B] B-SIDE ONLY

This package (which includes a DVD) demonstrates that Enon enjoy both melody and noise but savor unpredictability most of all.
MARK JENKINS
DOWNLOAD: "Knock That Door," "Marbles Explode"

THE INSECT TRUST

HOBOKEN SATURDAY NIGHT ✪✪✪

COLLECTORS' CHOICE

Holy patchouli! Wild-eyed hippies made a terrific album out of spare parts

What was the counterculture, anyway — America's last hopeful moment, or just a bunch of stoners making tragic fashion choices? This 1970 album from a band of East Coast VIP freaks (including the late, great music critic Robert Palmer on reeds) suggests that it was nothin' but a party good enough to blow your mind. Country blues, ragtime, avant-jazz, New Orleans gumbo, psychedelia and straight-ahead pop all get play here; one song features lyrics by novelist Thomas Pynchon, while another was co-authored by a 6-year-old. In this reissue's liner notes, *Blender* contributor Robert Christgau calls the Insect Trust "pluralistic tolerance in action, at once traditionalist, futuristic and entranced with the here and now." In other words, it's what democracy sounds like.
ANN POWERS
DOWNLOAD: "The Eyes of a New York Woman," "Our Sister the Sun"

MARTIKA

TOY SOLDIERS: THE BEST OF MARTIKA ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Her No. 1 single of 1989 was forgotten by many — but not by Eminem

In the dark years of girlpop, when the sun that had set on Tiffany and Debbie Gibson had yet to rise on Robyn and Britney, there was . . . Shanice. But there was also Marta Marrero, who as Martika traded in strong pipes, weak synth lines, lite robo-drums and heavy-handed children's choruses, one of which Eminem defibrillated for a current hit in his ongoing marriage of pathos and pathology. The Em-picked "Toy Soldiers" and Tika's other chart-lights are, er, all here — plus a dozen songs you'll neither recognize nor care about. The three killers (including Prince-penned "Martika's Kitchen" and "Love . . . Thy Will Be Done") are almost enough; one good remix puts the CD over the top, and the amusing half-Japanese version of the title song is pure gravy.
RENE VIENET
DOWNLOAD: "Love . . . Thy Will Be Done," "Martika's Kitchen"

Kylie loved her new wind tunnel.

MC5

ARE YOU READY TO TESTIFY: THE LIVE BOOTLEG ANTHOLOGY ✪✪✪

CASTLE MUSIC/SANCTUARY

Detroit longhairs, baby daddies of punk rock, commemorated in crappy-sounding live set

MICHIGAN MADMEN IN CONCERT

The Motor City Five were armed hippie freaks who turned good vibes into raw power in late-'60s Detroit. They took tight, bluesy garage rock and drove it to the intersection of heavy metal (which they invented as much as anybody) and punk. Their three studio albums were poorly produced, and guess what — these three bootlegged live shows make the studio stuff sound golden. The first disc, a 1968 show, is barely listenable, while disc two, from 1970, is way better and worth the price of admission. There are two incredible versions of the group's set-ender "Black to Comm," a rave-up that still sounds radical. Disc three was recorded at a Unitarian church in Detroit in 1968, and it turns out God needs to kick out the jams too.
RJ SMITH
DOWNLOAD: "Black to Comm," "Looking at You," "Fire of Love"

MEKONS

SO GOOD IT HURTS ✪✪✪

TOUCH AND GO

Hit-and-miss eclecticism from hardy alt-country progenitors

By 1988, the Mekons were already veterans, evolving from their late-'70s punk roots in Leeds, England,

I LOVE THIS CD!

JARED LETO
ACTOR, *ALEXANDER, REQUIEM FOR A DREAM*

SIGUR RÓS
( )
MCA

"They're from Iceland, and the music is beautiful and haunting and original."

Bono: Lex van Rossen/Redferns/Retna; iPod: Courtesy of Apple; Minogue: Leane Woolrich; Leto: John Shearer/Wireimage.com

into a mercurial – if ramshackle – entity. Back then, they were taken in by the plaid hearts of the nascent grunge scene and retrospectively credited as alt-country trailblazers, but today their ninth album sounds dated, steeped in Cold War paranoia. References to Reagan and Thatcher jar – as do punk-reggae interludes – but the gauche politicizing of "Robin Hood" is by far the nadir. Still, "Dora" and "Revenge" display a lyrical, multifaceted worldview, while the dizzying imagery of "Maverick" and "Fantastic Voyage" show a band as comfortable down in the dirt as they were with their heads in the clouds.

VICTORIA SEGAL

DOWNLOAD: "Ghosts of American Astronauts," "Dora"

KYLIE MINOGUE

ULTIMATE KYLIE ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Two decades of hits by Australia's pint-sized disco queen (and Justin Timberlake grab-ass target)

Kylie Minogue is the cut-rate Euro-Madonna: A pop changeling who has parlayed music-video savvy and a pip-squeak voice into massive record sales, so much so that in England, her royalty nearly surpasses the Queen's. This double-CD career survey starts with the garish '80s records she made as house diva in Stock, Aitken & Waterman's London hit factory, and gets more interesting as it approaches the present day, when Minogue begins to exert some songwriting control, and a 4/4 house thump enters her music. She'll never be a groundbreaker like Madonna, but there's no denying the campy pleasure of "Where the Wild Roses Grow," her unlikely duet with death-meister Nick Cave, and hits like "Spinning Around" and "Can't Get You out of My Head" are disco heaven.

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD: "Spinning Around," "Can't Get You out of My Head."

NEGATIVLAND

HELTER STUPID ✪✪

SEELAND

Bay Area sampling bandits turned their hoax into a 1989 album

In 1988, a Minnesota teen axmurdered his family after arguing with his dad about heavy metal. Later that year, Negativland sent out a bogus press release connecting the killings to their song "Christianity Is Stupid." Numerous press outlets believed the tale, and the group edited the coverage together to create the first half of *Helter Stupid*. (The rest is a dizzying tape collage encouraging radio stations to repackage '70s hits.) Intended as commentary on the lemming-like behavior of the mass media, and touted as a sampling breakthrough, it now sounds jumpy and unfocused, like late-'80s hip-hop without structure or hooks. They could have made the point better via print or spoken word, and their cut 'n' paste compositions aren't catchy enough to withstand a second listen.

ALEC HANLEY BEMIS

DOWNLOAD: "Helter Stupid"

The Mekons regret renting "airy" apartment.

THE SLITS

CUT ✪✪✪✪✪

KOCH

A 1979 reggae-punk oddity from the teenage girls who ruled safety-pin-era London

The Slits were the first important all-female punk band, but it took them more than two years to make this debut album. By then their rhythm section had adopted a fluid variation on the reggae that the first British punks loved. Still, these eccentric songs about shoplifting, lust and consumerism had mostly been written during the group's screech-and-bash days, so there's a delectable tension between Viv Albertine's twitching, stabbing guitar parts and the ultra-heavy grooves. And German-accented teenage frontwoman Ari Up – as original a singer as Johnny Rotten (who later married her mom) – trills, hoots, shrieks, whispers and reinvents the Motown hallmark "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" with the help of the band's disco-dub arrangement.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," "Newtown"

SLOWDIVE

CATCH THE BREEZE: THE ANTHOLOGY ✪✪✪✪

CREATION/SANCTUARY IMPORT

Once likened to Nazis, British group makes music for daydreamers and stoners

When they glided onto the British charts in 1990, Slowdive inspired awestruck critics to reach for the thesaurus, though the Manic Street Preachers, a group outraged by the Oxford quintet's dreamy blankness, branded them "worse than Hitler." It's hard to see how Slowdive's early, reverb-heavy homages to My Bloody Valentine ignited such passions.

BURIED TREASURE

UNEARTHING LOST CLASSICS

FU-SCHNICKENS

F.U. DON'T TAKE IT PERSONAL ✪✪✪✪✪

JIVE, 1992

Fu-Schnickens plead for a new name.

Brooklyn's Fu-Schnickens were the missing link between De La Soul, the Wu-Tang Clan, and the fleet-tongued toasters of Jamaican dancehall: irreverent specialists in warp-speed rap. The group's debut is unpretentious bliss, packed with soul samples and rhymes about cartoon characters. But it's the quicksilver technical prowess that astounds: Check the backwards verse in "Movie Scene" (sample lyric: "Dnatsrednu tnod scm dna detingi steg cim eht"), a feat that would curl Twista's toes.

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD: "True Fuschnick," "Ring the Alarm," "La Schmoove"

Tina Turner, after scalping the Lion King.

Their later, stronger albums *Souvlaki* (featuring genius producer Brian Eno) and *Pygmalion* form the bulk of this double-CD British set, perfect for anyone intrigued by the band's influence on moody new acts such as Death in Vegas and Sigur Rós. Drifting between sparse, vocal-led psychedelia and barely-there ambience, the second disc is often hair-raisingly beautiful: music to lose yourself inside.

DORIAN LYNSKEY

DOWNLOAD: "Machine Gun," "Crazy for You," "Country Rain"

TINA TURNER

ALL THE BEST ✪✪

CAPITOL

Tough-talking soul stylist has great legs, but her songs wobble

As anyone who's seen the Tina Turner biopic *What's Love Got to Do With It* knows, Ike Turner was an appalling human being, but during the couple's traumatic marriage, he was also an inspired talent-spotter. The handful of early songs here, including the planet-sized love song "River Deep, Mountain High," are toweringly good R&B. Tina's post-Ike career has its highpoints – she channels a world-weary stripper on "Private Dancer" and brassy singer Shirley Bassey on the James Bond theme "Goldeneye" – but nowhere near enough to fill two CDs. Most of the time, her hurricane of a voice is squandered on grimly synthetic soft-rock. "The Best" conjures up images of tipsy businessmen punching the air at a Midwest management seminar, and "It's Only Love," a blustery duet with Bryan Adams, reaches fresh heights of unpleasantness. What a waste.

DORIAN LYNSKEY

DOWNLOAD: "River Deep, Mountain High"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

DEEP THROAT: ANTHOLOGY, PARTS I & II ✪✪

LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

Sucky soundtrack to a XXX classic resurfaces

A porno soundtrack is a porno soundtrack, even when it accompanies history's greatest skin flick, ➔

Mekons: Jim Newberry; Turner: Paul Cox; Fu-Schnickens: George De Sota/LFI; CD: Mr. Snuggles

The Ramones: R.I.P. times three.

Linda Lovelace: "You want me to suck *what*?"

1972's *Deep Throat*. That most clichéd of musical subgenres, the blithe "bow-chikka-bow" one associates with lonesome housewives and wayward cabana boys, once lent rhythmic pep and a cheerful sheen to porn's mechanical repetition. Sans sex, though, the movie's tinny selections are all lube and no action. But not all the dirty disco written for the '74 sequel, an R-rated flop, is for jerks. (Both soundtracks were played by a mostly uncredited assortment of studio musicians.) "She's Got to Have It" tops drawling funk with T.J. Stone's punning meditation on morning nookie, and the melancholy of afterglow courses through the sleazy instrumental ballad "Deeper and Deeper." Still, this unnecessary collection is more than even fans of camp will swallow.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD: "She's Got to Have It"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

ECCENTRIC SOUL: THE BANDIT LABEL ✪✪✪

NUMERO GROUP

Chicago R&B label specialized in musical knockoffs — and one singer got knocked off!

Arrow Brown was a hustler who kept a harem of as many as 10 women on Chicago's South Side. He couldn't have had much in the way of spare time, but throughout the '70s he ran the tiny Bandit Records, whose acts copied the era's big R&B names in hopes of a fat payday. Johnny Davis mimics Curtis Mayfield's lilting sweetness on "The Love I See Now"; his career ended when he was thrown off a balcony to his death. The Majestic Arrows recall the dreamy harmonies of the Stylistics on "Another Day," while Brown's preteen son, Altyrone Deno Brown, captures the cute-yet-creepy vibe of young Michael Jackson with "Sweet Pea." An antidote to record-biz fairy tales, this fascinating, dubbed-from-vinyl set — the second in the Eccentric Soul series devoted to obscure labels — shows where the combination of a little talent and limited resources usually leads: nowhere.

JON YOUNG

DOWNLOAD: Johnny Davis, "You've Got to Crawl to Me"; The Majestic Arrows, "Make Yourself Over"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

LIF UP YUH LEG AN TRAMPLE ✪✪✪✪

HONEST JONS

Trinidad's bawdy party music endorses flames and sex

Trashy, sexy and bodacious, this soca compilation is no mere bookend to Honest Jons labelmeister Damon Albarn's 2002 sampler, *London Is the Place for Me*. The earlier, more subdued record focused on Trinidadians supplanted to '50s London, but *Lif Up* is as fresh and frenetic as tomorrow's news. Culled from the island's hit parade during 2004's annual Carnival bash, the nonstop blowout features known quantities like Denise Belfon, the Missy Elliott of the Caribbean, who champions the female-superior intercourse position on "Saucy Baby," as well as promising newcomers like Timmy, who sounds like a 12-year-old even while threatening to literally set your daughter's ass on fire. Balancing the posterior pyromania, Andre Tanker's "Food Fight" exposes the Iraq war as a worldwide battle for natural resources, but keeps its sense of humor. As Timmy says, "Bring de fire hose!"

JAMES HANNAHAM

DOWNLOAD: Timmy, "Bumpa Catch a Fire"; Denise Belfon, "Saucy Baby"; Andre Tanker, "Food Fight"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

NEW YORK ROCKS ✪✪✪✪

KOCH

The late-'70s NYC scene that invented punk, compiled in 14 songs and 48 minutes

IT'S THE STROKES' DADDIES

Some might carp that this efficient little celebration of New York punk is both too obvious and too obscure. Ramones, Patti Smith, Velvet Underground, Television, Richard Hell? Buy the albums, five unchallenged classics. And why the Mumps' "Crocodile Tears"? Why not the Contortions' "Contort Yourself"? Or anything by the New York Dolls? Nevertheless, the famous songs gather force back to back, and, the Mumps excepted, compiler Bill Crowley has mixed in some canny arcane: Mink DeVille, Suicide, Dead Boys? Skip the albums, save $50. All told, the disc evokes a scene worthy of that stupid term almost as well as closer Wayne (now Jayne) County: "The kids are jumpin' around everybody's doin' loop-de-loop/Just makin' the rounds like a speed freak in a telephone booth."

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD: Richard Hell, "Blank Generation"; The Heartbreakers, "Born to Lose"; Wayne County and the Back Street Boys, "Max's Kansas City 1976"

BLENDER APPROVED

The best reissues of the last few months

THE BEATLES

THE CAPITOL ALBUMS, VOL. 1

CAPITOL

For the first time ever on CD, the original American versions of the Fab Four's first four blazers. Get your moptop on.

NIRVANA

WITH THE LIGHTS OUT

GEFFEN

A three-disc/one-DVD collection of demos and B-sides that sheds ghostly light on the making — and unmaking — of a rock legend.

SHANIA TWAIN

GREATEST HITS

MERCURY NASHVILLE

The hottest Canadian singer since . . . well, ever, shows she's still the one with a perfectly polished pop-country best-of.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

GET DOWN TONIGHT: THE DISCO EXPLOSION

SHOUT! FACTORY

A 60-song binge of polyester suits, platform shoes and coked-up excess, guaranteed to ring your bell.

I LOVE THIS CD!

ANGELINA JOLIE
ACTRESS, *GIRL INTERRUPTED, ALEXANDER*

FRANZ FERDINAND
FRANZ FERDINAND
DOMINO/EPIC

"I think it's cool, but that's mainly because my son likes it. It makes him dance around the room."

Lovelace: Arrow Productions; Ramones: Denis O'Regan/Corbis

REISSUES IN BRIEF BY JON YOUNG

"Let's call ourselves, like, *Cactus*, man!"

GENE AUTRY

THE ESSENTIAL GENE AUTRY ✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

The easygoing Autry became king of the singing cowboys with hokey if agreeable sagebrush tunes like "Back in the Saddle Again." But his early work, from 1931, reveals a disciple of yodeler Jimmie Rodgers, conjuring darker, more complex visions on "T.B. Blues" and "Dallas County Jail Blues."

CACTUS

BARELY CONTAINED/THE STUDIO SESSIONS ✪✪

RHINO HANDMADE

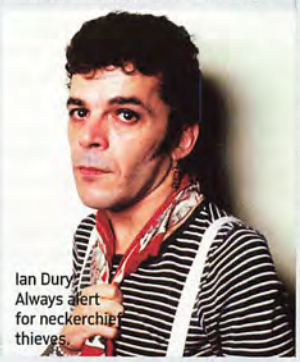
After churning out psychedelic sludge with Vanilla Fudge, bassist Tim Bogert and drummer Carmine Appice joined the blues-rock gold rush of the early '70s. Entertaining in a Spinal Tap way, Cactus spew dumb riffs as strutting meathead Rusty Day plays badass frontman. "Rockout, Whatever You Feel Like" is a clueless song title for the ages.

IAN DURY

NEW BOOTS AND PANTIES!! ✪✪✪✪
DO IT YOURSELF ✪✪✪

EDSEL

Partially crippled by childhood polio, Dury flourished during the late-'70s British punk boom, celebrating the earthy side of life in an endearing Cockney mutter. These U.K.-only sets expand his best albums to two discs, adding demos, live tracks and essential singles. The scruffy, booze-soaked rock of *New Boots* includes the timeless "Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll"; slicker and chillier, *Do It Yourself* increases the dance content, featuring "Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick," an oddly gripping raveup.


Ian Dury: Always alert for neckerchief thieves.

WILD MAN FISCHER

WILDMANIA ✪

COLLECTORS' CHOICE

It takes only a few dire seconds of Larry Fischer's 1977 outing — originally the first long-player from reissue pioneer Rhino — to spot a victim of severe mental illness. The L.A. native's howling on "I'm Selling Peanuts for the Dodgers" and "I'm the Meany" isn't charming or outrageous, just creepy and sad.

THE INTERNATIONAL SUBMARINE BAND

SAFE AT HOME ✪✪✪

SUNDAZED

Before jump-starting country-rock as a member of the Byrds and Flying Burrito Bros., Gram Parsons forged the template with the ISB in 1967. While his mesmerizing, stoned drawl is already in full force, the players, apart from cackling steel guitarist J.D. Maness, are puny. Highlight: the sleek, wistful "Luxury Liner."

ROBERT EARL KEEN

NO. 2 LIVE DINNER ✪✪✪

KOCH

The Texas troubadour waxes sentimental ("Rollin' By") and goofy ("Five Pound Bass") with charming flair on this '95 live album. While his western-swing grooves and scraggly singing hold no surprises, his genuine affection for slobs and losers is striking.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

THE ONLY DOO-WOP COLLECTION YOU'LL EVER NEED ✪✪✪✪✪

SHOUT! FACTORY

Prehistoric ancestors of 'N Sync, the great vocal groups of the pre-Beatles era boasted flowing harmonies and a cocky stance that electrified the corniest material. Forget oldies nostalgia and savor the Marcels' frantic "Blue Moon" or the Flamingos' spooky "I Only Have Eyes for You," the sexiest slow dance ever.

Cactus: Michael Ochs/Archive.com; Dury: Barry Schultz/Sunshine

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until THERE'S A CURE

Destiny's Child appears courtesy of Columbia Records
© 2004 Until There's A Cure Foundation Photo: Heward Jue

"No, you cannot poke my tummy."

TOUGH RAPPERS, TOUGHER CROWD

HIP-HOP HEAVIES

A fleet of cocky MCs vie for supremacy in a one-night showdown

FAT JOE, FABOLOUS, T.I., JUVENILE, TRICK DADDY

THE APOLLO THEATER, NEW YORK

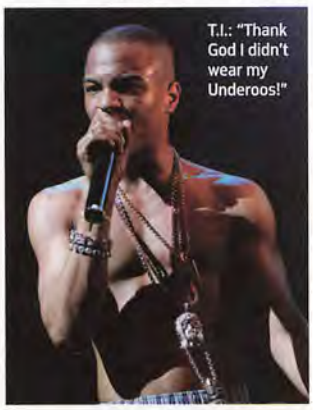
NOVEMBER 23, 2004 ✪✪✪

"LADIES, IF YOU pregnant, do not enter the radiation machines," cautions a jovial security guard in an Apollo Theater lobby lined with metal detectors. He pauses, then adds with a chuckle, "Ladies, if you *think* you pregnant, do not enter the radiation machines."

At the Apollo, even a weapons search can be a warm greeting. This 1913 Harlem venue treats its audience like family, because the crowds — unafraid to bellow distaste if an act fumbles in the slightest — are as vital to the show as the people onstage.

Tonight's Joint Chiefs showcase, built around Atlantic Records' rap roster, isn't an amateur competition, but the five MCs *are* hopefuls. Compared with superstars like Snoop Dogg or 50 Cent, they're talented underdogs, waiting on the breakthrough that separates a Busta Rhymes career — long, occasionally dazzling — from immortality. Each one keeps his set short and hit-heavy, as though preparing a concise case for this crowd of hanging judges.

Miami opener Trick Daddy has spent six albums exploring the "thug life" with a bluesy croak and a big sense of humor (if you're curious who owns the domain www.thug.com, it's him). On "Fuckin' Around" he delivers a hyperbolic taunt: "I'll kill every motherfucker you know/That's your mom, your sister-in-law, your daddy, your dog and your ho." Two songs later, he's praying for peace and proclaiming his *luvvv* for the kids. Many rappers argue dubiously that violence doesn't preclude values, but Trick integrates the two: For him, smackdowns can be life lessons.



T.I.: "Thank God I didn't wear my Underoos!"

Still, during his sappy numbers, chunks of the crowd mount a form of protest colder than booing: They talk loudly.

Juvenile's catatonic drawl — melodic, but unintelligible unless you live in his native New Orleans — has made him one of the South's biggest heroes. Tonight he looks as strange as he sounds: He hops in place, flailing his arms and flashing a smile that looks as if his dentist subcontracted to Tiffany's. He leads a rapturous clap-along on the mixtape-only New Orleans anthem "Nolia Clap," but his No. 1 pop hit, "Slow Motion," makes for a monotonous lull. The squeak of depressed chairs rings out again.

Freed early from a three-year prison bid for parole violation, Atlanta MC T.I. likes to sneer over songs that sound like sports anthems. The endlessly ascending organ riff on "Rubber Band Man" is pure halftime show, but it's a pinup moment — T.I. tears off his wife beater, and gold chains smack against his six-pack — that prompts a wild response. Sex sells as well in hip-hop as it does in teen pop — provided it comes with a death threat or two.

> SETS STAY SHORT AND HIT-HEAVY.

The headliners are Brooklyn's witty Fabolous and the Bronx's booming Fat Joe. Hip-hop fans want two things from superstars — big hooks and rich personalities. With a string of catchy singles, both New Yorkers have the hooks. But personality is a different story.

Ambling around and sighing rhymes, Fabolous is as casual as a pair of khakis. His high-energy single "Breathe" is a whirlwind of sped-up rock howls and piano lines, styled like a Jay-Z track. But unlike Hov, Fab lacks gravity. Cocky, laid-back and vicious with words, he is as good as bling-obsessed word-twisters get, but there's nothing to him *but* words. His personality is as developed as a Friendster profile. About me: Gangsta. Interested in meeting people for: Booty calls.

Halfway through Fat Joe's career, his mountainous heft went from menacing to cuddly. Finding Top 40 success in clublife and lovelife duets, the fierce battle-rapper started resembling Biggie Lite. Tonight, the song on everyone's mind is "Lean Back," his No. 1 hit with the Terror Squad. A swaggering treatise against dancing, the song is an ode to both masculinity and poor physical coordination.

It's also a hometown chant that fills the Apollo's aisles. Fat Joe errs by playing it halfway into his set. Then people start heading for the doors as if there's a fire. This show is about raps, not rappers, and none of these contenders has enough personality to keep a crowd mum unless he's spitting a hit. When Fat Joe pulls an Ashlee Simpson, lowering his mic while the backing track rhymes on, no one seems to enjoy the song any less. Thankfully, Fat Joe doesn't break into a jig. *JONAH WEINER*

Fat Joe: Paul Hawthorne/Getty Images; T.I.: Kristin Callahan/London Features

CHAIRWOMAN

How hard can a grandma rock? Pretty hard, when she's Frank Sinatra's daughter.

NANCY SINATRA

JOE'S PUB, NEW YORK

DECEMBER 1, 2004 ✪✪✪✪

"I MISSED TOM Jones last week — there was no fucking way I was gonna miss Nancy!" says a 20ish dude with a Strokes-worthy head of tousled hair. At 64, Nancy Sinatra is the fairy grandmother of rock hipsters, so it's a mixed crowd of 180 packed in for the second of tonight's sold-out shows — East Village punks, gay men shouting "You go, girl!" and AARP types who were young the last time Sinatra had a hit. They're all expecting a fizzy, Austin Powers–style flashback to the '60s, when the vibes were good, the hemlines high and Frank Sinatra's daughter sang the swaggering kitsch-pop classic "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'."

Yet, a funny thing happens when Sinatra takes the stage: A rock & roll show breaks out. She begins gradually, with a handful of signature tunes, including the spooky "Bang Bang" and the go-go anthem "How Does That Grab You, Darlin'?" Her five-piece band (with Clem Burke of Blondie on drums) is joined by a horn section to produce a sound of such gusty period perfection that you half expect a phalanx of miniskirted fembots to appear onstage and do the frug.

SHE'S A GRRRL POWER TRAILBLAZER.

Then the strange turn comes. The band crunches into "Drummer Man," and before you know it, Burke is soloing furiously as Sinatra air-drums along. There's a discernable look of consternation on the faces of old-timers at the tables up front. Next, Sinatra cries, "Oh, Stevie?" and Steve Van Zandt — Bruce Springsteen's right-hand guitarist and furrowed star of *The Sopranos* — shambles onstage, doo-rag dangling past his ass, for ripping versions of his own "Baby, Please Don't Go" and Sinatra's 1966 hit "Friday's Child."

"Flowers" starts with Nancy crooning a dissonant melody, proceeds through a bewildering series of rhythmic changes and ends, minutes later, with a glorious squall of noise by the two guitarists. Somewhere in the middle, it occurs to you: This is without question the greatest psychedelic mini-epic ever performed for an audience of orecchiette-with-shaved-asiago-eating supper-club diners.

Sinatra's majestic blond bouffant is intact and, sure enough, peeking out from the bottom of her snakeskin vinyl pants are a gleaming pair of black leather boots. She doesn't move much during the snappy set — just some hip-shimmying and a bit of weird hand-jive — but her voice sounds both bigger and more supple live, particularly when she slides into the bluesy "Two Shots of Happy, One Shot of Sad" ("A song that Bono and the Edge of U2 wrote for my papa," she says).

Since the two-year stretch from 1966 to 1968, when she had 10 Top 40 hits, Sinatra has been treated mercilessly by critics, mostly for being slighter and goofier than her father. But in the last few years everyone from Madonna to Kim Deal of the Pixies has recognized her as a Grrrl Power trailblazer, and her 2004 self-titled album features tailor-written songs by an illustrious brigade of indie rockers — Pulp's Jarvis Cocker, Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore and Calexico. Sinatra plays several of these tonight, notably Morrissey's "Let Me Kiss You," which she delivers with a blend of grandeur and cheek.

Of course, there's one song that everyone in the place wants to hear, and when the first droopy bass note of "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'" sounds, the place erupts. Polka-dotted spotlights strafe the club, Van Zandt's wife is boogying in the VIP booth, and even the hipsters seem to be dancing with genuine abandon.

The show winds down with "100 Years," another old hit, which she describes as "my philosophy of life." So what is that philosophy? "I'm not gonna take second best/I've got no use for the rest," she belts over a raggedy folk-rock jangle. It's a strangely familiar message of stubborn self-reliance that more or less boils down to "I did it my way." She's her father's daughter, after all. *JODY ROSEN*

"... And that's how I made my pants out of two anacondas."

Sinatra: Pieter M. Van Hattem

HOW'D YOU LIKE THE SHOW?

"I was expecting more of a gay crowd, but it was surprisingly mixed. I loved 'These Boots Are Made for Walkin'.'"

ALEX CLARK, 30
DJ, NEW YORK CITY

"She was just incredible. Her voice was as good as it used to be. And she looked great."

BEN CASSARA, 50
TOY STORE OWNER
NEW YORK CITY

"She's sexy at a ripe old age. I loved 'These Boots Are Made for Walkin'' — that's my karaoke song."

KATIE FLYNN, "35-ISH"
ARTS PROFESSIONAL
NEW YORK CITY

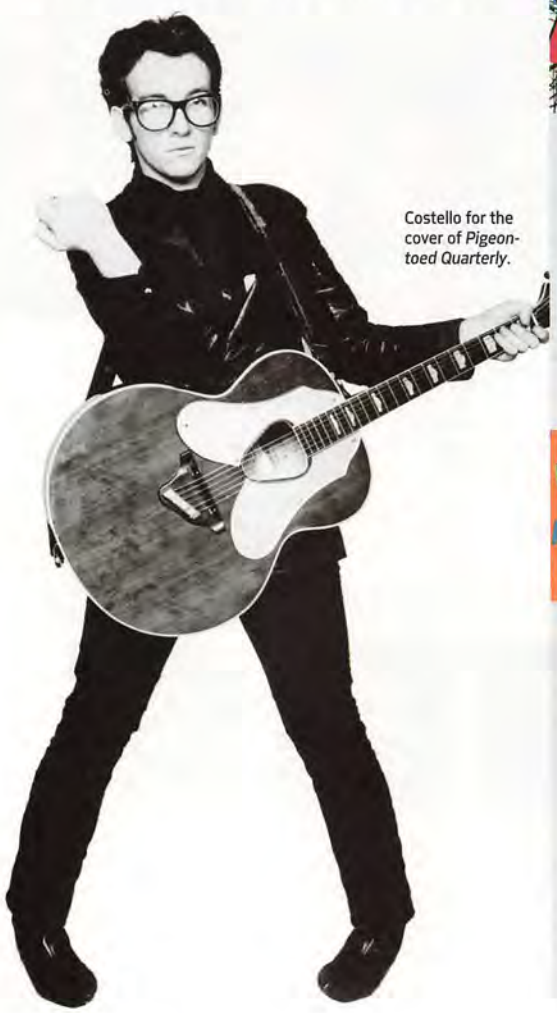
ELVIS COSTELLO

The prince of "revenge and guilt" rants, he's since matured into a master of song. By Douglas Wolk

EVERY ORIGINAL CD REVIEWED

BOTH BRILLIANT AND maddening, Elvis Costello is one of the most audacious, accomplished songwriters alive. Born in England as Declan MacManus, Costello rode the crest of punk in the '70s, although his music also builds on American R&B and country. Singing in a nasal rasp that he wields with remarkable grace, he found ideal bandmates in the Attractions (keyboardist Steve Nieve, bassist Bruce Thomas and drummer Pete Thomas).

His records are famous for their vitriol — he once said, "the only two things that motivate me and that matter to me are revenge and guilt" — but they're also tuneful and hyperverbally smart, with a vein of hard-earned tenderness. He's hugely prolific — most of his CDs have been reissued with bonus discs — and loves confounding expectations, even when his stylistic reach exceeds his grasp.



Costello for the cover of *Pigeon-toed Quarterly*.

ESSENTIAL

THIS YEAR'S MODEL *RHINO, 1978*

★★★★★

The Attractions, the ad hoc band Costello had assembled for a tour, turned out to be perfect creative foils. On his second album, they made a New Wave breakthrough, propelled by the frothing skinny-tie attack of Steve Nieve's organ. The songs are terse, snarky disembowelments of romantic clichés — Costello described the record as "more vicious overall" than *My Aim Is True*, which is saying something.
Download: "No Action," "Radio, Radio," "You Belong to Me"

ARMED FORCES *RHINO, 1979*

★★★★★

A songwriting landmark about nasty collisions of the personal and the political — the working title was *Emotional Fascism*. The Attractions, vacuum-tight after a solid year on the road, frame Costello's show-offishly catchy melodies and acerbic wordplay in grand, tricky arrangements. Secret power-pop weapon: producer Nick Lowe, who wrote the magnificent rocker "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding?" for Costello.
Download: "Accidents Will Happen," "Oliver's Army," "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding?"

GET HAPPY!! *RHINO, 1980*

★★★★★

Exhausted with New Wave and reeling from a disastrous, drunken brawl in Ohio that left him charged with racism and convicted of assholedom, Costello bought a big stack of old soul singles for inspiration and reinvented the Attractions as a high-speed, Stax- and Motown-inspired '60s R&B act. The unexpected but brilliant result plays like anybody else's greatest-hits album: an enormous pile of compact, witty melody-grenades.
Download: "Love for Tender," "Temptation," "Motel Matches"

KING OF AMERICA *RYKODISC, 1986*

★★★★★

Released under the name "The Costello Show" and recorded mostly with American rockabilly and R&B musicians — including some who had backed up that other Elvis — this is an actual mature album: thoughtful, calm and introspective, with songs that are more deep than clever. The ragged-voiced Costello is not just paying tribute to the country (and Gram Parsons) records he loves; he's absorbed them, and he's building an English palace on their terrain.
Download: "Brilliant Mistake," "The Big Light," "The People's Limousine"

BLOOD & CHOCOLATE *RHINO, 1986*

★★★★★

Freshly married to Pogues bassist Cait O'Riordan, Costello (crediting himself as "Napoleon Dynamite"!) made his fuck-you-and-goodbye album: blistering songs about sexual despair and disgust, played live to tape, with the Attractions almost blowing out their amps and Elvis spitting himself hoarse. Two tracks are over six minutes long, because the venom won't stop spilling out.
Download: "I Hope You're Happy Now," "I Want You," "Baby's Got a Brand-New Hairdo"

LIVE AT THE EL MOCAMBO *RYKODISC, 1993*

★★★★★

A scorched-earth live set recorded at a Canadian club in early 1978, with the Attractions turbocharging songs from *My Aim Is True* (including an even more brutal rewrite of "Less Than Zero," with lyrics about the JFK assassination) and tearing through most of *This Year's Model* at gunpoint speed. The best argument for EC & the A's as a first-rank punk-rock band; widely bootlegged, and available legitimately for about ten minutes a decade ago.
Download: "Less Than Zero," "Mystery Dance," "Waiting for the End of the World"

Image courtesy of michael ochs archives.com

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ALL THIS USELESS BEAUTY

RHINO, 1996

✪✪✪

The Attractions' final bow. There are flashes of their old fire, but also of weariness. The repertoire is mostly autumnal, regretful songs Costello wrote for other singers, with lyrics in the voices of characters questioning their lives.

Download: "You Bowed Down," "The Other End of the Telescope"

BESPOKE SONGS, LOST DOGS, DETOURS AND RENDEZVOUS

RHINO, 1998

✪✪✪

The superior twin of *All This Useless Beauty*: not quite a tribute album, but a remarkable range of other artists doing EC songs. A few struggle with Costello's torrents of $10 words, but many of these versions trump his own.

Download: Robert Wyatt, "Shipbuilding," Paul McCartney, "My Brave Face"

PAINTED FROM MEMORY

MERCURY, 1998

✪✪✪

Burt Bacharach and Costello cowrote a song for the 1996 movie *Grace of My Heart*, which led to this creamy album of sophisticated easy-listening. The acerbic Elvis gives Bacharach more solemn lyrics than his '60s hits had, although he's no Dionne Warwick.

Download: "God Give Me Strength," "Toledo"

VERY BEST OF ELVIS COSTELLO

RHINO, 2001

✪✪✪

This collection doesn't have the coherence of his studio albums, and it suffers from crummy sequencing — eight weary slow ones in a row end its second disc. But most of the songs are gems and it's baited with a cover of Charles Aznavour's "She," which was a huge hit for him overseas.

Download: "Big Tears," "That Day Is Done"

BE CAREFUL

ALMOST BLUE

RHINO, 1981

✪✪

The first of many genre experiments to come, recorded under the influence of a marriage (and plenty of booze) on the rocks. Costello took the Attractions to Nashville to drown his sorrows in other people's country standards, produced by schmaltzmeister Billy Sherrill. But the overwrought results are mostly interesting as a gesture of defiance.

Download: "Stranger in the House" (with George Jones)

GOODBYE CRUEL WORLD

RHINO, 1984

✪✪

Costello has called this "our worst record," although it's not *that* bad — "most dated" is probably more accurate, thanks to its awful, synth-heavy production. His misery-wallowing is swaddled in reams of verbiage, although a handful of the songs are terrific, as the stripped-down versions on the reissue reveal.

Download: "The Only Flame in Town"

COSTELLO & NIEVE

WARNER BROS., 1996

✪✪

A two-hour, five-EP live set recorded on an American tour as a duo, with a repertoire that draws heavily on *All This Useless Beauty*. Costello treats almost every song as a tortured, dramatic ballad, which works only about half the time; Nieve gives his piano the cocktail-lounge treatment.

Download: "My Dark Life"

FOR THE STARS

UNIVERSAL CLASSICS, 2001

✪✪

A collaboration with Swedish opera singer Anne Sofie von Otter, for which Costello wrote a few songs, selected some odd covers (the Beach Boys, ABBA, Tom Waits) and poked his scruffy voice into the mix. Nicely arranged, but the two singers are barely on the same planet.

Download: "Like an Angel Passing Through My Room"

FOR FANS ONLY

G.B.H.

RYKODISC, 1994

✪

An instrumental soundtrack for an early-'90s British TV series — Richard Harvey (who, unlike Costello at the time, knew musical notation) did the actual orchestrations. Boring and tuneless, for the most part, although a few themes showed up on *Mighty Like a Rose*.

Download: "G.B.H. Opening Titles"

CRUEL SMILE

ISLAND, 2002

✪

Effectively a bonus disc for *When I Was Cruel*. The Imposters (i.e., the Attractions with bassist Davey Faragher replacing Bruce Thomas) blaze onstage, but you'd hardly know it from the pro forma live tracks here. Also present: outtakes, useless remixes and two covers of Charlie Chaplin's "Smile," a fluke hit in Japan.

Download: "Smile"

NORTH

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON, 2003

✪

To celebrate his romance with jazz singer Diana Krall (they married in December 2003), Costello wrote his dullest-ever set of original songs: dreary piano ballads, smoothly sung, with a tasteful orchestra on a few tracks. The standards he *has* written are a lot livelier.

Download: "You Left Me in the Dark"

IL SOGNO

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON, 2004

✪

An orchestral piece, written as the score for a ballet based on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Costello clearly has a strong grasp of tone and color; his use of the full orchestra (plus a jazz drummer) is totally competent. And when they start handing out awards for competence, he'll be the first person called.

Download: "Oberon and Titania"

GREAT

MY AIM IS TRUE *RHINO, 1977*
✪✪✪✪

A geeky, awkward 22-year-old computer programmer who'd stored up a century's worth of resentment, Costello made his first album in a hurry with Clover, a bland American band. But the amazing material cuts through the dim performances: bitter country songs hopped up on bitterer coffee and arranged as sneering rock, plus a cruelly honest ballad he never stopped playing ("Alison").
Download: "Watching the Detectives," "Alison," "Blame It on Cain"

TRUST *RHINO, 1981*
✪✪✪✪

Costello calls this "the most drug-influenced record of my career," and it's also his most fragmented and jittery. The fifth album he'd made in less than four years, it drew heavily on songs written before his debut, with cryptic, nervous lyrics, and the Attractions twitching in rhythm.
Download: "Watch Your Step," "From a Whisper to a Scream," "New Lace Sleeves"

IMPERIAL BEDROOM *RHINO, 1982*
✪✪✪✪

Rather tough to understand thanks to its adventurous orchestrations and hyperdense songwriting (aside from the dark, lucid ballad "Almost Blue"). Keep digging, though, and there are some gorgeous songs here; the Attractions get to show off their range and subtlety too.
Download: "Almost Blue," "You Little Fool"

SPIKE *RHINO, 1989*
✪✪✪✪

With lyrics drawing on British history and the travels of Costello's grandparents, his most varied album also became his best-selling. It was recorded piecemeal with a cast of thousands, notably Paul McCartney, who co-wrote "Veronica," Costello's biggest American hit.
Download: "Veronica," "Deep Dark Truthful Mirror," "Let Him Dangle"

MIGHTY LIKE A ROSE *RHINO, 1991*
✪✪✪

Costello grew his hair and beard for an Old Testament–prophet look, but this is basically *Spike II*: another assortment of styles, featuring a Beach Boys parody, malevolent character sketches, crazy guitar noise, and "How to Be Dumb," a three-chord anvil dropped on Bruce Thomas in retaliation for his tell-all "novel," *The Big Wheel*.
Download: "The Other Side of Summer," "All Grown Up," "Hurry Down Doomsday"

DEEP DEAD BLUE *NONESUCH (UK), 1995*
✪✪✪✪

A delicate, EP-length live collaboration with jazz guitarist Bill Frisell, recorded at the Meltdown festival in London. They cover Charles Mingus and the 1958 movie tune "Gigi," as well as some deep-catalogue EC gems; Frisell's subdued, mirage-like tone inspires Elvis to hold back a little and, for a change, follow his partner.
Download: "Shamed Into Love," "Baby Plays Around," "Deep Dead Blue"

WHEN I WAS CRUEL *ISLAND, 2002*
✪✪✪✪

Costello's first album of new rock songs in eight years is bilious and guitar-heavy, incorporating bright ideas from his experimental sojourns (like the title track's creepy sample) and pissy lyrics about aging and youngsters. Returning prodigals Pete Thomas and Steve Nieve jockey for position in the mix.
Download: "Tear Off Your Own Head (It's a Doll Revolution)," "When I Was Cruel No. 2," "45"

THE DELIVERY MAN *LOST HIGHWAY, 2004*
✪✪✪✪

Recorded in Oxford, Mississippi, this concept-album-that-ditched-its-concept is informal, clattering, funny and rowdy as hell. Costello has rarely sung this roughly or freely (although Lucinda Williams steals the show with her boozy cameo), and everyone sounds as if they're having a blast.
Download: "There's a Story in Your Voice," "Monkey to Man," "Button My Lip"

CHECH IT OUT

PUNCH THE CLOCK *RHINO, 1983*
✪✪✪

In a not-entirely-successful attempt to score pop hits, Costello slicked up his production and augmented the Attractions with a horn section. "There's probably four real songs on that album," he later snorted, but it's got a whimsy and effervescence that's rare in his work, offset by two devastating songs about Margaret Thatcher–era British politics.
Download: "Every Day I Write the Book," "Pills and Soap"

THE JULIET LETTERS
WARNER BROS., 1993
✪✪✪

An alternately elegant and stilted tie-and-tails affair featuring a string quartet with whom Costello cowrote many of the songs (loosely based on the idea of contemporary letters written to Shakespeare's Juliet Capulet). "I'm a serious musician," he insisted. "I don't have the technique that these people do, but I'm serious about what I'm doing."
Download: "The Birds Will Still Be Singing"

BRUTAL YOUTH *RHINO, 1994*
✪✪✪

Inspired to rock again by writing a "cartoon punk" album for Brit heartthrob Wendy James in a weekend, Costello reconvened two-thirds of the Attractions and finally mended fences with Bruce Thomas for five songs. Some of his attempts to evoke his '70s vigor are too glib, but the band slips right back into its groove.
Download: "13 Steps Lead Down"

KOJAK VARIETY *RHINO, 1995*
✪✪✪

Recorded in 1990 (with the Rude 5, EC's touring band at that time) but unreleased for five years, this casual set of obscuro covers is fun, even if he can't quite pull off his Little Richard impression. The reissue adds a kick-ass set of demos for country singer George Jones.
Download: "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go"

The Fabulous Moolah, top, and Judie Grable exchange pleasantries.

THE GOOD!

GIRL ON GIRL ACTION

Welcome to the wonderfully sleazy world of female wrestling. By Clark Collis

LIPSTICK & DYNAMITE, PISS & VINEGAR

DIRECTED BY Ruth Leitman

STARRING The Fabulous Moolah, Gladys "Killem" Gillem, the Great Mae Young

TOWARD THE END of this documentary, Gladys Gillem is asked whether it's true that she "bit some guy's dick off once." Gillem, a frail 82-year-old grandmother, denies it, and says it's something she would probably remember. But Gladys has already admitted that her mind has gone "back and forth" ever since she had that operation to stick an eye back into her skull. Said orb had become displaced when she was wrestling another woman — as opposed to the bears and alligators she also grappled with from time to time. Some things she remembers clearly, though. Like "fucking" that promoter and "sleeping on the ground with a good man and a bottle of whiskey." Oh, did we mention that the sweet Ms. Gillem has a nickname? "Killem."

There may be some women wrestlers from the '40s and '50s whose stories *don't* resemble a particularly demented Tom Waits song ("Gonna drink me some bourbon/Get in the ring with a female midget/Oh yeah!"). But none of them get to make an appearance in Ruth Leitman's film about early female grapplers. Instead, we meet the likes of the Great Mae Young, a self-confessed "dirty wrestler" who was known for greeting strangers with the words "Hi, fuckface," and Ella Waldek, a tough-as-nails broad who reveals that she spent her childhood being "beaten to death for no reason at all." Towering above them all, however, is Lillian Ellison, a.k.a. the Fabulous Moolah. An infamously cash-obsessed wrestling legend who was blinging it up before most of today's rap stars' *parents* were born, Moolah was also someone you really didn't want to meet in the ring for fear of being gouged with the spoon handle she kept secreted in her generous décolletage.

Golden Girls: The Early Years was swiftly canceled.

SHE WRESTLED BEARS AND ALLIGATORS.

In short, director Leitman makes a strong case that old-time female wrestlers were every bit as tough as their male counterparts — and that they also routinely ran the risk of being hideously screwed, in every sense, outside the ring. Despite this, *Lipstick & Dynamite* shows a distinct lack of sisterhood, as all concerned take the opportunity of the camera's presence to bitch about each other and settle old scores. Cheaply made and too short, but utterly enthralling nonetheless, the result can also claim to be the first film ever to appeal to feminist study groups and Hulk Hogan fans alike.

THE BAD!

MISS CONGENIALITY 2: ARMED AND FABULOUS

DIRECTED BY John Pasquin

STARRING Sandra Bullock, William Shatner

While *Miss Congeniality* wasn't that bad, it's hard to imagine anyone was left wondering what happened to Sandra Bullock's hard-nosed FBI agent *after* she became the world's oldest beauty-pageant contestant. For the record, this dismally and, we're guessing, incorrectly titled sequel finds her traveling to the now seriously overexposed location of Las Vegas to rescue William Shatner's kidnapped emcee. Bullock's partner this time around is *Ray* star Regina King, and the cast has also been enriched by the always great (if usually in crappy movies) Treat Williams.

& THE INDIE!

ONG-BAK: THE THAI WARRIOR

DIRECTED BY Prachya Pinkaew

STARRING Tony Jaa, Petchthai Wongkamlao

How much does it hurt when someone slams an elbow into your skull? Quite a lot, judging by the pained reactions of the many goons 'bowed by Tony Jaa in this Thai martial-arts extravaganza. The latest actor-puncher to be hailed as a worthy successor to Bruce Lee, Jaa's elbow-heavy style of chopsocky is less elegant than the kung fu icon's, but he is an impressive physical presence, at one point beating the crap out of people while his pants are on fire. An easy synopsis: stolen relics, secret fight club, burning trousers, happy ending.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best MOVIES of the past few months

IN GOOD COMPANY

Dennis Quaid's new boss is the geeky kid from *That '70s Show*.

THE ASSASSINATION OF RICHARD NIXON

Sean Penn *is* a Tricky Dick–hating furniture salesman.

LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?

JASON LYTLE, SINGER, GRANDADDY

"Finding Neverland. I left the theater not wanting its magic to leave me. For me that rarely ever happens."

AND THE REST . . .

DON'T MISS

BE COOL

DIRECTED BY F. Gary Gray

STARRING John Travolta, Uma Thurman

THE PITCH *Get Shorty* sequel finds Travolta's loan shark Chili Palmer muscling his way into the music industry. Aerosmith and a playing-it-gay The Rock also feature.

THE VERDICT The Elmore Leonard novel rang oddly untrue, but who's going to pass up seeing John and Uma onscreen together for the first time since *Pulp Fiction*?

ASSISTED LIVING

DIRECTED BY Elliot Greenebaum

STARRING Michael Bonsignore, Maggie Riley

THE PITCH Old folks' home janitor Michael Bonsignore's nurse phones residents pretending to be their dead relations, and smokes a great deal of grass.

THE VERDICT A very tough watch, but an ultimately uplifting one, with award-worthy performances from Bonsignore and, as an Alzheimer's sufferer, Maggie Riley.

CURSED

DIRECTED BY Wes Craven

STARRING Christina Ricci, Joshua Jackson

THE PITCH The *Scream* team of Craven and writer Kevin Williamson attempt to breathe new life into the werewolf genre.

THE VERDICT With extensive reshoots and a repeatedly delayed release date, the omens do not look good. But then, they didn't for *Scream* either. And, hey, Scott Baio's in it!

MILLIONS

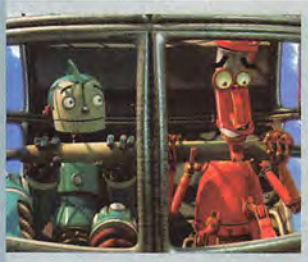
DIRECTED BY Danny Boyle

STARRING Alex Etel, Lewis McGibbon

THE PITCH When two young brothers find a money-filled suitcase, they have different ideas about how to spend the loot.

THE VERDICT Although similar at first glance to director Boyle's thriller *Shallow Grave*, this kiddie-aimed dramedy is a different, if equally entertaining and odd, prospect (grass-toking religious saints *are* involved).

DON'T RUSH



ROBOTS

DIRECTED BY Carlos Saldanha, Chris Wedge

STARRING Ewan McGregor, Robin Williams, Mel Brooks

THE PITCH CG-animated comedy set on a world full of robots

THE VERDICT Depends on how much ad-libbing from Williams you can stand, given that his motormouthed Fender — not to be confused with *Futurama*'s motormouthed Bender — is the main comedy generator.

9 SONGS

DIRECTED BY Michael Winterbottom

STARRING Kieran O'Brien, Margot Stilley

THE PITCH A young couple in London see some bands — including Franz Ferdinand and Primal Scream — and have a lot of explicit sex.

THE VERDICT *Very* explicit sex. In fact, despite the pedigree of the *24 Hour Party People* director, this is basically porn. But with fewer getting-lucky plumbers.

Farrell/Retna U.K.; Cursed: Eric Lee; Millions: Giles Keyte; 9 Songs: Marcel Zyskind

"This one's for all you Jungians!"

ANALYZE THIS!

A rock documentary sees Metallica going to therapy — with Spinal Tap–esque results. By Clark Collis

SOME KIND OF MONSTER

PARAMOUNT

★★★★

IF ROCK STARS have learned anything over the past couple of years, it should be to run like hell whenever they see a camera crew coming their way. Being the subject of a documentary is, for bands, the media equivalent of breaking a mirror while standing under a ladder as a pack of black cats cross their path. In the course of being filmed for the movie *Dig!*, Brian Jonestown Massacre frontman Anton Newcombe became a full-bore junkie. Meanwhile, graveyards are filling up with members of the Ramones who have died since shooting started on last year's band doc, *End of the Century*.

IT'S MONSTROUSLY ENTERTAINING.

No one in Metallica actually died while they were being filmed for *Some Kind of Monster*, the movie that traces the making of 2003's *St. Anger* CD. But that's about the only bad thing not to have occurred. As the movie opens, relations between James Hetfield and Lars Ulrich have become so grim they recruit a "performance-enhancement coach" to act as band therapist. But with the headshrinkery only just begun, Hetfield decamps to rehab before finally returning on the condition that they rehearse for only four hours a day, partly because he wants to attend his daughter's ballet class. (One can only assume this is the frontman's karmic penance for missing his son's first birthday to shoot bears and guzzle vodka in Russia.)

Elsewhere, Ulrich decides to pick a disastrous fight with Napster and then drunkenly watches his considerable art collection being auctioned off at Christie's, leaving guitarist Kirk "I try to be an example of egolessness" Hammett to do an unintentional but quite brilliant impersonation of Spinal Tap's hapless peacemaker Derek Smalls.

Whether you regard all this as the behavior of loveable metal self-improvers or repellent egomaniacal asswipes probably depends on what you thought of the band in the first place. But the end product is, either way, huge fun for the viewer — and infinitely more pleasurable than the album they finally ended up recording.

CELLULAR

NEW LINE HOME ENTERTAINMENT

★★★

Text messaging. Videogaming. Driving the plots of absurd but hugely enjoyably movies. Is there anything cellphones can't do? Every roaming minute counts in this *Speed*-y thriller, which hinges on Chris Evans's race to save kidnapped Kim Basinger's life after she MacGyvers a few wires into a phone and randomly calls his cell from her attic prison. Tension rises as failing batteries, wimpy signals and every other known digital screw-up transform the slacker beach bum into a combination of Tom Cruise and that guy from the Verizon ads. Extras include commentaries and deleted scenes. *DALE HRABI*

DEADWOOD: COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

HBO VIDEO

★★★★

After a slow start, HBO's Wild West series really kicked into gear when its creators realized that the real star was not Timothy Olyphant's noble retired marshal but Ian McShane's menacing brothel owner — the most deliciously evil TV character since *Dallas*'s J.R. But did Larry Hagman ever melancholically reminisce about his childhood while getting a blow job from a hooker? We think not.

THE NOTEBOOK

NEW LINE HOME ENTERTAINMENT

★★★★

The Notebook's poster didn't hail it as "the most romantic movie about Alzheimer's ever!" But that's what it is. James Garner and Gena Rowlands provide the contemporary framework, he trying to restore her memory by reading a romantic story. Ryan Gosling and Rachel McAdams are the WWII-era lovers of the tale itself, he trying to woo her despite being dirt poor and looking like a Skynyrd drum tech. Romantic movie-haters should feel free to sneer all they like — just don't then try to blame your final-act eye-watering on the air conditioner.

PAULY SHORE IS DEAD

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

★★

Metacomedy in which the playing-himself Shore fakes his own death in an attempt to resuscitate the onetime MTV icon's flatlining career. Sadly, what could have been a hilarious, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*-esque look at the ignominies of Hollywood failure is instead a very Pauly Shore-esque vehicle for masturbation gags and largely humorless celebrity cameos by everyone from Tommy Lee to Ellen Degeneres. But if there is a funnier movie scene this year than Sean Penn trying to remember which Baldwin brother was in *Bio-Dome*, we'll be very surprised.

RAGING BULL

MGM/UA HOME VIDEO

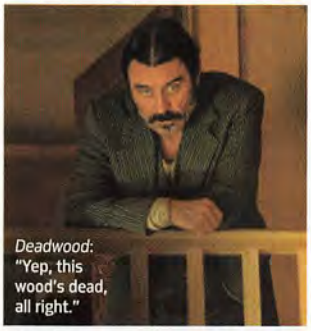
★★★★★

Robert De Niro put on 50 lbs. and one hell of an attitude to portray punchy-turned-paunchy boxing champ Jake La Motta in Martin Scorsese's black-and-white anti-*Rocky*. Bob was rewarded with a deserved Oscar, while your reward for purchasing this Collector's Edition is a raft of extras, including the director's commentary, a making-of documentary and a shot-by-shot comparison of De Niro and La Motta in the ring. Also available as part of the Martin Scorsese Film Collection box set, along with *Boxcar Bertha*, *New York, New York* and the still awesome Band concert flick *The Last Waltz*.

"Ha — missed me!"

Some Kind of Monster: Everett Collection; Raging Bull: Kobal Collection

Shaun of the Dead: "Anyone for cricket?"



Deadwood: "Yep, this wood's dead, all right."

SHAUN OF THE DEAD

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪✪

Don't be put off by the easy laugh of the title. This low-budget British movie has the chops to tickle your funny bone *and* freeze your shit. Simon Pegg, of cult U.K. sitcom *Spaced*, stars as a videogame-addicted loser who at first doesn't even notice that London has been overtaken by zombies, and then moronically resolves that he should wait out the undead menace in his beloved local drinking hole. Laughs, extreme gruesomeness and a bunch of insanely obscure references to previous undead films ensue.

THE VILLAGE

BUENA VISTA HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪

So surprising is the "surprise" ending to M. Night Shyamalan's latest fright fest that the *Blender* staff guessed it after watching just the trailer. But if this tale of a 19th-century hamlet being menaced by woodland beasties is the director's lamest yet, it's still worth seeing to catch the amazing performance of Bryce Dallas Howard as "ye olde spunky blind girl." Also featured are Shyamalan-introduced deleted scenes and a featurette.

WICKER PARK

MGM/UA HOME VIDEO

✪✪

Do you like films that seem to be thrillers but turn out to be soapy melodramas and feature an over-abundance of scenes set in a shoe shop? You don't? Well, that would explain the rather tepid box-office performance of this preposterous, if stylish, movie. Josh Hartnett is the man trying to find his long-lost love. Matthew Lillard is the friend who, uh, sells shoes.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best DVDs of the last three months

WE DON'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE

WARNER HOME VIDEO

The most effective argument against infidelity since herpes!

OZ
SEASON 4

HBO VIDEO

Be reminded why you *never* want to drop your soap in the shower with the best prison series ever.

MUSIC DUDs BY LAUREN HARRIS

BRITNEY SPEARS
GREATEST HITS: MY PREROGATIVE *JIVE*

✪✪✪✪

With Britney on extended, frappuccino-filled honeymoon, this sparkling collection of the pop tart's 20-video oeuvre depicts the arduous journey from her acquisition of fame to her negotiation of it, leaving the gyrating schoolgirl of ". . . Baby One More Time" in the dust. Each clip progresses through more mature emotional terrain, from wars with the paparazzi and resulting suicide in "Everytime" to her reckless driving/marrying in "My Prerogative." Extras include bloopers and alternate camera angles.

CAT POWER
SPEAKING FOR TREES *MATADOR*

✪✪✪

Famous for onstage meltdowns, Cat Power finally finds an audience she's comfortable with here — mother nature. This film sets Cat and her guitar alone in a woodland clearing. Peppered with mumbled covers and hybrid gems of recycled riffs and new lyrics, her melancholic set sounds (nearly) happy.

ELTON JOHN
DREAM TICKET *TWENTY-FIRST ARTISTS*

✪✪✪

Three concerts and hundreds of costume changes (hits in New York; with an orchestra in London; and solo at an arena in Turkey) show the decadent pianist as one of life's great grinners. A lengthy doc spans his career, with little mention of the duck-suited, coke-hoovering days. *JOHN AIZLEWOOD*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
MTV UNPLUGGED *COLUMBIA MUSIC VIDEO*

✪✪

Backed by a new band, the Boss decided at the last moment that his 1992 performance on MTV's *Unplugged* acoustic show should be, well, plugged in. That's cool. Not so fine is his choice of material, largely from the then-recent, middling *Human Touch*/*Lucky Town* albums. *CLARK COLLIS*

JET
FAMILY STYLE *ELEKTRA*

✪✪✪✪

This DVD centers on a crackling live show from the elegantly wasted Australians, featuring their hits and an Elvis-meets-AC/DC cover of "That's Alright." In a tour doc, singer Nic Cester refrains from thumping a writer who asks if he prefers Crocodile Dundee or Croc Hunter. *CLARK COLLIS*

THE WHITE STRIPES
LIVE UNDER BLACKPOOL LIGHTS
V2

✪✪

Meg bops along barefoot as Jack does his best Robert Plant, and the UK audience visibly enjoys this comprehensive set. But the grainy, home-movie format is more suitable to giving the viewer a headache than to conveying the Stripes' renowned raw power.

Shaun of the Dead: Universal Studios Home Video; Deadwood: HBO Films; We Don't Live Here Anymore: Warner Home Video; Oz: Everett Collection

THUG LIFE

One of the best-selling series of all time takes a spin through Compton ganglands. *Duck*! By Jonah Weiner and Gabe Soria

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

ROCKSTAR – PS2

✪✪✪✪✪

FOR MOST SUBURB-DWELLING wankstas, "doing a drive-by" means denting Mrs. Peterson's mailbox with an old little-league bat. Luckily, for those with gangsta fantasies and 50 Cent CDs to match, the latest in the wildly popular *Grand Theft Auto* series (its predecessor has sold over 11 million copies, after a whopping 1 million on its first day) pumps some serious P.I.M.P. into the PS2. Moms: If your kids start tossing the phrase "trick-ass buster" around the den, *this* is why.

Set in early '90s Los Santos – L.A. in all but name – *San Andreas* is rich in era-nailing detail. You ride around on a chrome BMX. G-funk blares from passing low-riders (the fine soundtrack includes Cali monuments like Dr. Dre and alt-rockers like Faith No More). Your best friend looks like Eazy-E (Raiders cap included). And in the late afternoon, the game captures the amber, smog-filtered glow of an L.A. sunset.

SPRAY GRAFFITI, PLANT DRUGS, UNLOAD CLIPS.

The plot is sprawling and interwoven. As Carl Johnson, you advance by completing missions of increasing gangstatude: graffiti-ing over rival gangs' tags, planting drugs in a D.A.'s car, unloading clips into dealers who have started slinging crack in your 'hood and – in one particularly funny sequence – breaking into a corporate rapper's mansion to steal his rhyme book.

Of course, as with any *GTA* game, following the plot is only half the fun. Any time you wish, you can carjack, head-stomp and cap-pop anyone unlucky enough to share the street with you. When the cops roll up, you can do it to them, too, starting a little L.A. riot of your own.

TENCHU: FATAL SHADOWS

SEGA – PS2

✪✪✪✪

For all its tech flash, *Fatal Shadows* owes its biggest debt to the bloody, low-budget samurai films of the '70s that inspired *Kill Bill*. Hell, it's even divided into *Bill*-esque chapters (the grainy titling is a grindhouse-ariffic touch) and features two female assassins. *Blender* always figured skulking around medieval Japan making sushi out of rival ninjas might be a fun pastime, and – whaddaya know? – *Tenchu* proved us right.

THE MATRIX ONLINE

SEGA – PC

✪✪✪

To *The Matrix Online*'s credit, its open-ended, plotless mode of play actually comes off as *more* coherent than the last two films. Players invent characters and join other like-minded Neo-wannabes on the Internet to have adventures, do fancy kung fu and unleash endless rounds of automatic gunfire – which is all good, but didn't the movies rail against this "getting lost in the computer world" sort of thing? We're just sayin' . . . .

RATCHET AND CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL

SONY – PS2

✪✪✪✪

From Sonic to Starfox, bushy-tailed, wisecracking bipeds are a venerable videogame institution. Ratchet, a coyote-looking hero with a mile-wide grin and permanently arched brows, adds two things to the tradition: a gadget-filled robot homey, Clank, and an arsenal that makes *Men in Black* look like a Civil War re-enactment. Slashing villains, he's hyperviolent, in a cute 'n' cuddly kinda way.

GOLDENEYE: ROGUE AGENT

EA – PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

✪✪✪

Here's a first-person shoot-'em-up with a twist clever enough to put a sinister smile on any madman's face. Set in James Bond's gadget-fetish world, you're a fallen spy in the employ of the other side, bankrolled by world-conquering villains and killing anyone who crosses you. The moribund *Bond* franchise could take a cue: Screw the Brit pretty boy and let the evildoers win for a change.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best GAMES of the past few months

TAIKO DRUM MASTER

NAMCO – PS2

Make like the second coming of Keith Moon in this hypercute and hyperhectic drum simulator.

HALO 2

MICROSOFT – XBOX

Bigger, faster, louder, more guns: This more-popular-than-Jesus sci-fi sequel was worth the agonizing wait.

Start waking up the neighborhood.

With Star Fox Assault you've got three ways to bring the carnage. Go ballistic in your Arwing Fighter. Start bulldozing in your Landmaster Tank. Or go commando on foot. Then step it up to multiplayer mode for a real challenge.

STAR FOX ASSAULT

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Fantasy Violence

NINTENDO GAMECUBE™

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DREAM GIRL

The stormy, piano-straddling songstress puts a New Age spin on the musty rock memoir. By Laura Sinagra

TORI AMOS: PIECE BY PIECE

By Tori Amos and Ann Powers

✪✪✪ *BROADWAY BOOKS, $24*

MEET TORI AMOS: New Age scholar. This autobiographical portrait of the artist – midwifed by rock critic (and *Blender* contributor) Ann Powers – is no mere star memoir. With chapters themed for different points on the creation cycle – inspiration, composition, image, performance – it's more like a soul-map of Amos's stride from pop tart to poet provocateur.

With the giddiness of stoned grad students, our piano-humping diva and her writer pal log their discussions on Dionysian catharsis, subverting the Dark Prince (read: Trent Reznor) and the erotica of song craft.

Mining legend and lore from French softcore to Aztec ritual, Amos and Powers riff on bad love, good marriage, traumatic pregnancies and eventual motherhood, leaving space to thrash corporate devils, talk shop and go shopping. Selected "song canvasses" unpack the origins of tunes like the Grandpa-tribute "Winter" and honeycomb hideout "The Beekeeper."

Sure, to some this might sound like a masters class at Woo-Woo U. But who else but our resolutely pretentious dervish (and former frontgirl of the disavowed Y Kant Tori Read) would give *The Da Vinci Code* such a Vivid Girl twist – inviting Mary Magdalene, Carl Jung, Venus and Frodo Baggins to the same muse orgy?

STUDIO A: THE BOB DYLAN READER

Edited by Benjamin Hedin

✪✪✪ *W.W. NORTON AND CO., $25*

Exhaustively corralled here are more than 50 poems, articles, interviews, criticisms and lyrical narratives; mercifully omitted are Dylan-inspired menus, grocery lists and ransom notes. While completists might relish having all the old debates (was Bob booed at Newport because he went electric or because of the festival's lousy sound system?) in a single tome, the more casual fan should skip the beat poetry in favor of Nat Hentoff's account of a 1964 recording session or Rick Moody's gorgeous ode to *Blood on the Tracks*. *ALYSIA ABBOTT*

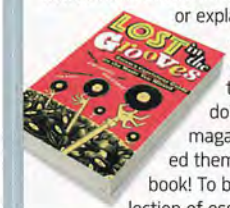
LOST IN THE GROOVES

SCRAM'S CAPRICIOUS GUIDE TO THE MUSIC YOU MISSED

Edited by Kim Cooper and David Smay

✪✪✪ *ROUTLEDGE, $20*

You know those irritating people who buttonhole you at parties to tell you about some obscure concept album or explain that no one "gets" dub reggae the way they do? Well, *Scram* magazine persuaded them to write a book! To be fair, this collection of essays in support of various neglected CDs does have some heavyweight contributors, such as crime author George Pelecanos and cartoonist Peter Bagge, though the latter books himself a ticket to the funny farm by claiming to "love" Aaron Carter's rapping. *CLARK COLLIS*

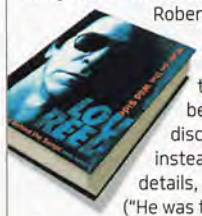


WALK ON THE WILD SIDE: THE STORIES BEHIND THE SONGS

By Chris Roberts

✪✪ *HAL LEONARD, $23*

"Put all the songs together and it's certainly an autobiography," Lou Reed says here. "It's just not necessarily mine." Therein lies the rub for Roberts, a British journalist trying to find the inspirations behind Reed's discography. But instead of juicy details, purple prose ("He was the broken-glass voice and tangled sinful heart of the Velvet Underground") and rock-critic clichés comprise the bulk of this pun-pricked pseudo-biography. The closest we get to epiphany? Reed's favorite diss is "two-bit." *YANCEY STRICKLER*



VANILLA POP: SWEET SOUNDS FROM FRANKIE AVALON TO ABBA

By Joseph Lanza

✪✪✪✪ *CHICAGO REVIEW PRESS, $15*

Inspired by a musical epiphany the author experienced while waiting online at a Duane Reade drugstore, this lovingly researched book attempts to defend the whitest of white music from the dismissive sneers of music snobs. With contagious enthusiasm, Lanza reveals the engineering tricks behind the dulcet sounds of '50s and '60s froth along with the artists who sang them. But if you're hoping for a David Lynch–like unveiling of evil beneath the sweet surface, it never comes. *ALYSIA ABBOTT*

BLENDER APPROVED

The best BOOKS of the last three months

WAKING UP WITH A PLACEBO HEADWOUND

Images by Jay Blakesberg and J. Michelle Martin-Coyne
WWW.FLAMINGLIPS.COM, $125

Stunning pix of the Flaming Lips.

DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

By Dave Navarro and Neil Strauss
REGAN BOOKS, $30

A fascinating look at a year in the bizarre life of a self-indulgent rock star.

"I feel . . . bad."

THE BEST PART OF A BIG BOOK!

WHATEVER POSSESSED **JAMES BROWN** TO LEAD COPS ON A WILD CAR CHASE?

"Yeah, it was resisting arrest all right, by a Black man in the South with White officers shooting up his car and reloading their weapons, and no witnesses anywhere. Resisting arrest from some armed men about to make my head match the tires they had just shot full of holes."

Excerpted from* I Feel Good: A Memoir of a Life of Soul, *by James Brown. © 2004 Penguin, $25

Books: Mr. Snuggles; Brown: Pool Photographer/Wirelmage.com

WIN THIS HOME THEATER SYSTEM

Want to turn your living room into a cinema, but without the stale popcorn? Just fill out the right answers to this crossword puzzle for your chance to win a JVC-THM505 home theater system, including a five-disc DVD player, amplifier and speaker set.

PENCIL ME IN

Hey, it's *Blender*'s crossword! Starring 14 across!

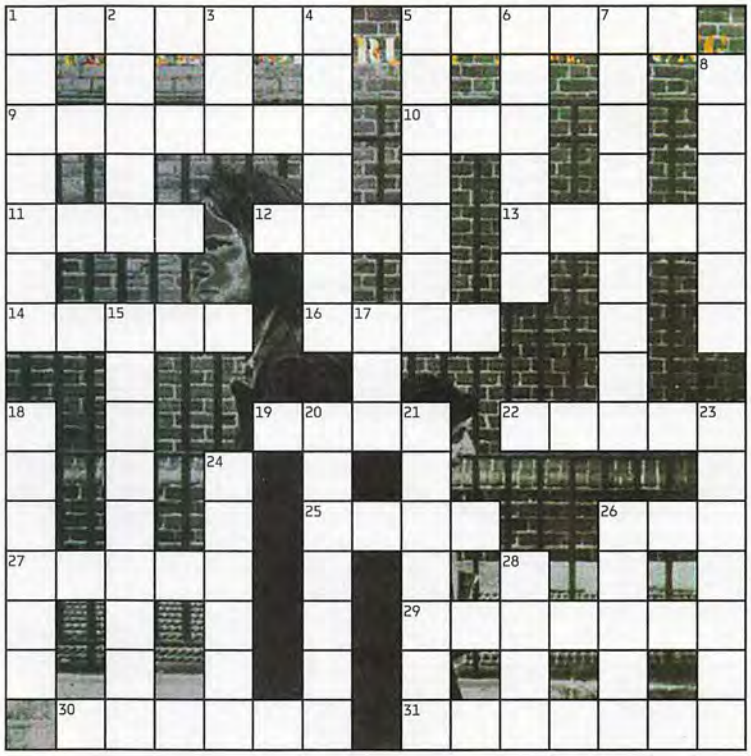
BY BRENDAN QUIGLEY

ACROSS

1 2004 U2 hit featured heavily in iPod commercials
5 Eminem's latest CD
9 New Orleans crooner Aaron
10 Coldplay's record label
11 "____ Shot" (1994 Beastie Boys hit)
12 Jonathan Davis's rap-rock outfit
13 Head Foo Fighter
14 _____ *the Gold Rush* (Neil Young)
16 Scruggs of Flatt & Scruggs
19 Henry Rollins used to wave a black one
22 Grammy nominee _____.Arie
25 7-Down's head guy
26 Notorious subject of the song in 3-Down
27 50 Cent's protégé Lloyd
29 Rapper who starred in *Barbershop*
30 & 31 She was busted lip-syncing on *SNL*

DOWN

1 Ivory-tickler Carlton
2 23 Down wants you to take him here
3 "___ Be Missing You" (P. Diddy)
4 Idealistic Bob Marley hit from 1977's *Exodus* (two words)
5 Rigby of Beatles folklore
6 He's a Balla Baby
7 Kid A's daddies
8 This R&B singer has "unfinished business" with Jay-Z
15 California tomboys turned hair-metal goddesses
17 1977 Steely Dan classic album with the hit "Peg"
18 This gangsta rapper might pimp your ride
20 Feminist pop-punk trio fronted by Kathleen Hannah
21 Ciara's first No. 1 (2004)
23 Reverend soul singer
24 Dizzee rapper from the U.K.
26 B.B. King's genre
28 Tag ____ (responsible for "Whoomp! There It Is")



→ Send your completed puzzle to *Blender* Puzzle Contest, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, NY 10018

POP HISTORY

1936 TO 1994: JESSICA AND ASHLEE'S RELATIONS HAVE THEIR MOMENT OF FAME

WRITTEN BY CLARK COLLIS. ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN JAY

↓ Jessica and Ashlee were not the first members of the Simpson clan to become famous. Grandpa Simpson also had an ultimately disastrous brush with stardom.

↓ Then there was their great-aunt, Wallis Simpson, whose relationship with King Edward VIII of England sparked the abdication crisis of 1936.

↓ Ashlee, meanwhile, learned all about making excuses from the clan's most infamous member: O.J.

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James Devaney/WireImage.com

THE BULKY, 32-YEAR-OLD BRONX-BORN RAPPER IS A STUMBLING DRUNK, "ATHLETIC" IN THE SACK AND NEWLY THIN. WELL, OK, THINNER. BUT THE QUESTION ON OUR LIPS IS . . .

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

WHO DOES FAT JOE THINK HE IS?

YOU KNOW WHO YOUR SELF-PORTRAIT LOOKS LIKE? MR. CLEAN.
[*Laughs.*] Mr. Clean or Dennis Rodman. I think I did a good job. I needed to draw some big ears for that big head. I couldn't do no puny ears.

ACTUALLY, IT'S KIND OF DISAPPOINTING TO MEET YOU. YOU'RE NOT REALLY THAT FAT.
I lost maybe 70 pounds in the last year. No personal trainer, just cardio every day, an hour on the bike or the treadmill. And soon I'm starting the weights, so it's about to get real ugly. I weigh like 290 now. At 5 years old they called me Fat Joe. I've been Fat Joe my whole life. Every now and then I get a couple of the fat guys telling me, "Ahh, you're leaving us, Joe."

AND THEN YOU'LL BE CHUBBY JOE. WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE PHONE CALL OF YOUR LIFE?
Truthfully, it's a bad phone call. When Big Pun was passing away, his wife called me and told me, "He's not breathing, he's not responding." I rushed over there. I was there when he was fighting for his life, but I don't know if he could really hear me.

WHAT ARE YOU LIKE WHEN YOU'RE DRUNK?
Funny. Liquor just makes you forget your problems and get happy — that's why they call it liquor. So I'll drink a Grey Goose and cranberry — oh! No, I gotta say Bacardi, because I'm sponsored by Bacardi. Two drinks, and I'm a problem.

TWO DRINKS? FOR SUCH A BIG GUY, YOU'RE SURE A LIGHTWEIGHT.
I don't smoke, and I can't drink. I remember one time I drank a beer, and I was fucking stumbling.

HOW MUCH ICE IS TOO MUCH ICE?
Never enough. I see some little old ladies in Miami with rings the size of my earlobes.

WHAT PERSONAL HABIT DO YOU HAVE THAT OTHER PEOPLE FIND ANNOYING?
I'm messy, for sure. And my wife is such a neat freak. The house could be spotless, she'll leave town for two days, and by the time she gets back, it's upside down.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR TASTE IN SEX?
Crazy weird questions, yo! Taste in sex? Frequent, athletic — I put in that work. Punish her. I'll do whatever I've gotta do to please my wife.

WHAT DO YOU HATE TO SPEND MONEY ON?
I've been rapping for 13 years, and we do everything you could imagine: fly private, drive Maybachs and Rolls-Royces, eat expensive every night. I'm not cheap. I'm having the time of my life. But I'm ready for the rainy days, trust me. I got a portfolio, own several properties. I bought acres in Florida for $55,000, and four years later they're asking to give me $150,000 for it.

HOW COME RAPPERS NEVER SMILE IN PHOTOS, WHEN THEY HAVE SO MUCH MONEY?
We're programmed that way. It's just the attitude of a rapper since birth, since Jerusalem. When you compete against each other, they call it a battle. Battles are really wars, because you're lyrically battling. We're not mad, that's just the way our pioneers brought us up: the boasting, the bragging.

WHAT'S YOUR ASTROLOGICAL SIGN, AND WHAT DOES IT SAY ABOUT YOU?
Leo. I'm a ruler, a lion, the king of the jungle.

HAS THE LION EVER BEEN ARRESTED?
Hell yeah. I've been arrested a bunch of times, but never convicted. Driving with no license, or fighting, just shit kids go through in the ghetto. Standing on the corner in the South Bronx at 3 A.M. on a Saturday, drunk, arguing with a dude, having a fight, cops come, you get locked up.

ARE YOU A GOOD BOY OR A BAD BOY?
Both. I'm a great role model, I give back to my community. So that makes me a good boy. The bad side is, I love to party, I have plenty of explicit lyrics. I get rid of my frustration through music, so I say the craziest shit you could imagine. I'm a good boy who makes songs about being a bad boy.

REMEMBER: "Don't forget to dance, don't forget to smile."

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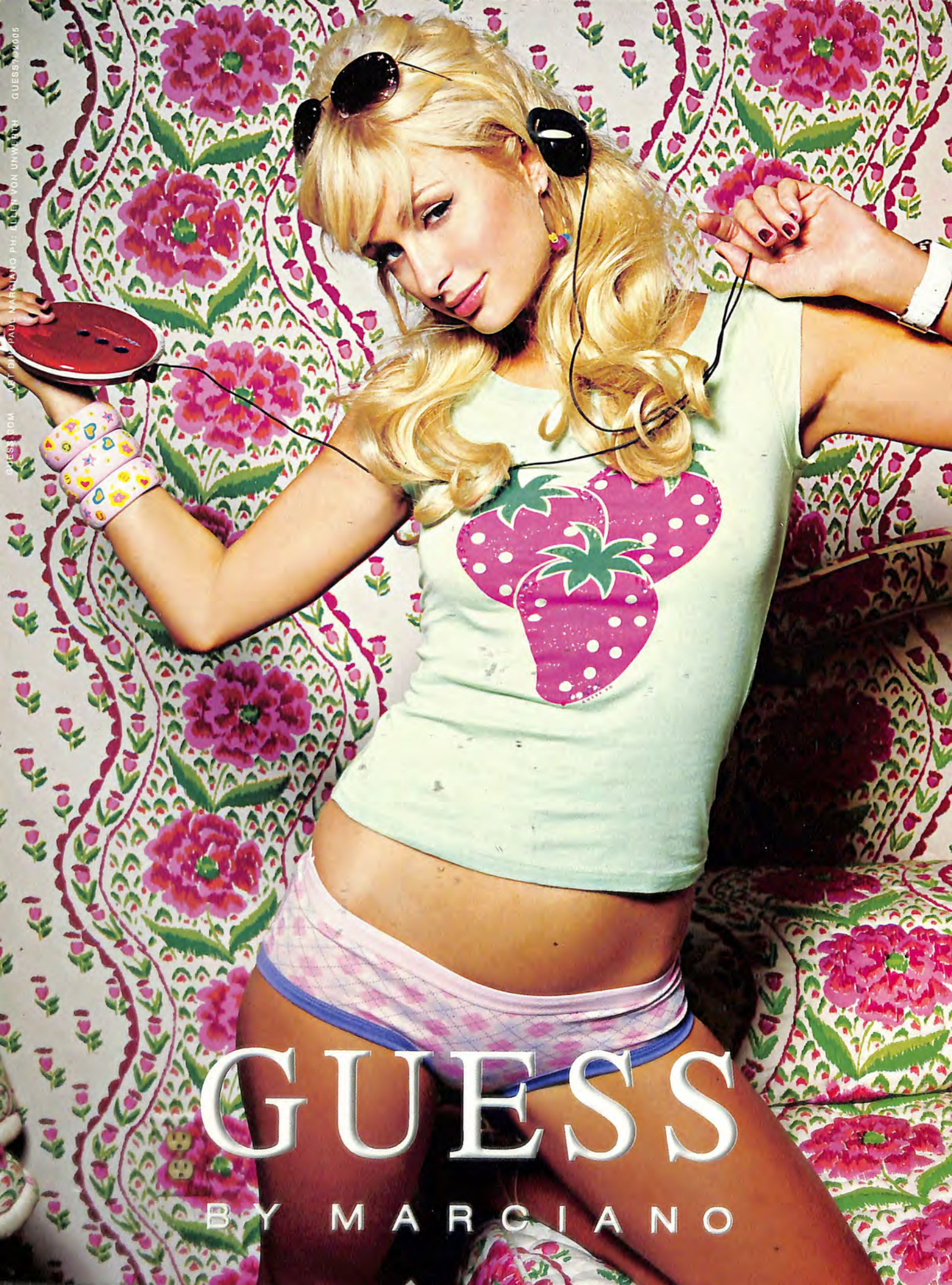
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